**Raspberry**

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# Raspberry

by Black_Lotus

Summary

In the wake of Jack's defeat Hannibal had hoped to return to life as usual, yet, after the fluttering of Will's eyes, he had instead found himself the protector of the House and an avenging angel.

# Chapter 1

Will startled awake to a loud clatter from downstairs, a sort of metal on wood sound. Sleep rapidly fled as Will hopped out of bed in just a t-shirt and boxers to make his way to the stairs where he listened for what was happening. Memories of Margot flashed into his mind and the sudden urge to check on the twins had him in the nursery before he'd even realized he'd moved. Both Claude and Veronique slept peacefully in their cribs which instantly soothed his nerves, but Winston was absent and he knew he'd not imagined that clatter. So, with slow steps, Will made his way to the first floor where he spotted the dining room light had been turned on and more metal on wood sounds emulated – though nowhere near as loudly. Carefully he padded to the doorway only to be met by Winston coming out. The dog didn't seem alarmed or bothered at all which was good, but Winston couldn't have turned that light on and that only left one option. Sure enough, sat at the dining room table was Hannibal shirtless, bloody gauze in a neat pile and various medical paraphernalia set out beside it.

"What the fuck happened?!" Will demanded as he rushed to his mate's side in time to see Hannibal tie the suture and reach for the bandages. Blue eyes finally took notice of the bloody bullet Hannibal had dug out of his flesh. "Was this Jack?"

"No, my darling boy, this was Mason Verger and he is now dead in the House's basement. I am fine, I promise." Despite the pain he was surely in, Hannibal pulled Will down into his lap and cuddled him close. Muscles might have been exhausted but that didn't stop him pulling Will close. "Jack is dead, he can never hurt you or another omega again. Mason Verger is dead. Abel Gideon is dead. Every guard other than Jimmy Price, Barney Matthews and a new beta named Josh, are dead. The House is gone."

Will swallowed. The House couldn't hurt anybody anymore, Will and the other omegas were free. He didn't believe it – no, he wanted to believe it but a little voice in the back of his head couldn't quite grasp that, in a single night, such a place of evil had been reduced to nothingness. He'd escaped from the House knowing nothing of the real world or if he'd even survive the snow, knowing that if he did survive then he'd spend the rest of his life looking over his shoulder, yet Hannibal had ripped it all down for him. Those monsters couldn't perpetuate their violence and savagery another moment.

A kiss to his temple brought Will's mind back to him. "You're free, brangusis. I love you and you are free. You're friends are alive and well, Jimmy and Barney are with them."

After Hannibal had left for the House there had been a good hour of Will chastising himself, of screaming he shouldn't have let Hannibal walk out the door as casually as if he'd popped out to get milk. His mate not returning had been a real possibility but he'd just pretended Hannibal was some immortal being. Did Hannibal have a guardian angel watching over him? Were serial killers allowed to have those?

"Can I see them?" Will suddenly asked which surprised even himself. "Now, not in the morning."

After a moment Hannibal nodded. It wasn't exactly a short drive but he only had afternoon appointments, and Will wouldn't be able to calm himself until he'd seen everyone personally. That was why Hannibal agreed, not because he cared deeply for the well-being of those at the House or because he was a good person, just so his mate felt better. Having gained permission without much fuss, Will rushed back upstairs, flicked on the bedroom light, practically blinding himself, and yanked the closet open. The sight of Hannibal's pristine suits hanging beside Will's preferred jeans and plaid shirts had always amused him but he'd not thought about it in that moment, instead he'd grabbed what he needed and pulled them on. Once the buttons of his shirt were closed, he caught sight of himself in a mirror and opted to run a comb through his messy curls; Hannibal would have only grumbled about it and ushered him back upstairs had he not. Presentable, he made his way out into the hall just in time to see Hannibal ascend the stairs.

"If you'd kindly ready the twins, Will, I shall change and then drive us to the House." He kissed the omega's temple. "Are you certain you want to go back there? Just looking at the building can stir up traumas."

Will took a calming breath. "I need to do this, Hannibal. I get what you're saying but I have to see my friends, I want them to know I didn't just forget about them. Besides, Jack's dead and you'll be with me, right?" Hannibal nodded an affirmative. "Then nothing bad can happen."

With his mind made up, Will continued to the nursery while Hannibal changed out of his bloody things. Veronique still slept soundly but Claude had roused and looked up at his daddy with those maroon eyes he'd inherited from Hannibal; Will had no doubt Claude would become the spitting image of the alpha soon enough. Despite the late hour and somewhat rude awakening, the twins didn't protest as Will dressed them in warm clothing and placed each of them in their car seats.

They drove the hour journey to Wolf Trap thankfully with the twins having slipped back off into sleep. The radio stayed off and the mates didn't say much; while not an uncomfortable silence, it felt inappropriate to chatter. Hannibal kept his eyes firmly on the road while Will stared out the passenger window as streets turned into open plains and eventually dense woodland. In a couple more hours the sun would begin to rise signalling a new day, a day without Jack Crawford in it, a day without Mason Verger in it.

Hannibal turned off the road then and up a dirt path which could have been so easily missed. A Bentley on a dirt road, that would likely lead to a thorough cleaning later. Twists, turns and steadily narrowing paths were the next fifteen minutes of their drive. Will had always wondered how people had actually reached the House and it seemed he finally had his answer, they had to know exactly where they were going and be careful not to strike a tree on one of the narrow turnings. Hannibal stopped the car eventually under a thick crop of trees beside three other cars – two were beat-up mini vans, one navy and the other black, while the third car was a better-kept Land Rover which surely must have belonged to Jack. Will might not have been aware, but Hannibal had bothered to ask Price about the cars; the Land Rover was indeed Jack's, while the mini vans were used to transport all the guards around in shifts to limit the number of vehicles travelling the area. There had likely been a third mini van which Cordell had used to move the kidnapped omegas to a proper truck.

"We walk from here, Will," said Hannibal as he turned the engine off. "It's not far."

They made quick work of taking the twins out the Bentley and started off up a small incline in the dark. Hannibal used his cellphone as a flashlight and insisted on carrying Veronique's car seat despite the bullet hole in him. The very second that ghastly cocreate building came into view Will's feet stopped and refused to go further. He just stared up at it with panicked blue eyes and knew this was exactly what Hannibal had feared.

"Relax, William. All is well. I will never harm you. There is no need to go inside, you have every right to change your mind. I'll take you home if that is what you want."

"No," breathed Will. "This is something I need to do." So, despite Hannibal's concerns, the two made their way toward the House illuminated only by a single light at the main door. "Did you really kill everyone?"

Hannibal confirmed he had as he buzzed the main door, that they bodies were out of the way in the basement. The House's horrors would be confined down there from now on where they couldn't inflict more trauma.

The mates were admitted then and slipped inside only to sit the twins' car seats onto the reception desk before Price. The silver-haired beta quickly flashed the pair of them a silly smile before he turned to Will.

"Everything is okay, Will. Hannibal did what he said he would." Though quiet, it amazed the three men just how much lighter the place felt without Jack or Mason in it. "The others are in your old room, do you want to see them?"

"Of course I do." Will replied emphatically, he'd come all the way out into Wolf Trap, he'd not turn away now. "Let's go."

So up the stairs they all went. While the clean up wasn't perfect, it was surely better than it had been two hours ago – something Will was thankful for. The scent of bleach lingered in the air to the

point it was almost choking, but at least the bodies were out of sight. That the security gates were all wide open was what surprised Will the most, the omegas didn't really have anywhere to go, but the simple fact the gates were unlocked proved just how much had changed in such a short amount of time.

Will swallowed before slipping inside the small room he'd spent so many years of his life trapped in; that door had been wide open as well, all the doors were. Hannibal and Price lingered in the doorway as Will was hauled into a desperate hug by Abigail, a tight thing which threatened to cut his air off for a moment there.

"You came back! You came back!"

Will kissed the younger girl's head softly. "I'm sorry it took so long."

Nobody knew quite what they'd expected from their reunion, but Alana cutting it short hadn't been among the possibilities.

"You're Doctor Hannibal Lecter." Alana accused drawing everybody's attention to her. "I've seen you at charity events before. You donated to the Omega Lives fund – a huge amount. Why are you here?"

That threw the ball firmly into Hannibal's court but he wasn't worried, always had a charming answer for everything prepared.

"Will is a former captive of the House, he is now my mate and I want only for his happiness. His greatest wish was for his friends, and by extension you, to be freed from this captivity just as he was. I assure you, Miss Bloom, I am now the only alpha in this building and it will stay that way."

"So you're the new master?" Asked Abigail as she continued to cling to Will.

"No," Hannibal shook his head. "I have no intention of taking over Jack Crawford's business nor locking you all back up."

Will squeezed the young teen. He'd always felt protective of her, she'd been so young when she'd been carried into the House and Will had always sense a sort of kinship between them, like they were cut from the same cloth or, probably more correctly, lingered in the same darkness. A darkness he could tell Abigail saw lurked in Hannibal as well.

~X~

Several hours later after the omegas and remaining betas had gotten some rest and mentally digested Jack's and Mason's deaths, when Will had greeted his friends and grieved the loss of Beverly and Brian – he trusted Hannibal to find them just as he had with the House – Josh and Barney had gathered everybody in the library. For many it was the first time they'd left their rooms for anything other than the intermittent showers and bathroom privileges they'd been given under Jack's rule, but gathered they had. Hannibal could easily see how suspicious they all were of him, the alpha who'd come in and basically single-handedly killed all their kidnappers and jailers, but Will beside him with the twins helped to soften his image somewhat.

The library had a mezzanine around it on three sides reminiscent of his office but without the ornate design and expense, it had probably been used to store equipment for whatever the House had been originally, so Hannibal had climbed the winding stairs up there with Will to address those gathered.

"I know you are all wondering what is happening and I don't blame you for that, it is a logical thing to do. As you should all know by now, Jack Crawford is dead, there will be no more masters and Mason Verger cannot inflict his sadism in guise of keeping you all in line. They are gone. Now, while it is undeniable I am an alpha, I am only here at the behest of Jimmy Price and Barney Matthews as well as my mate, Will. You will be owned by nobody from this moment forth." Hannibal could feel the atmosphere in the room steadily change. "You are free to return to your homes if you wish to, I shan't stop you. However, the House had clients who are high-ranking members of the police so the House cannot be exposed publicly. While your wish for revenge, for people to know your stories, is understandable it will only paint targets on your own backs and that of my mate. This is the one thing I *won't* allow. I've already spoken with Alana Bloom who has access to the resources to help you adjust to life outside the House, I ask that you accept those resources. She and I will work to create a new narrative which keeps the House a secret."

One of the braver omegas launched to her feet. "So we're meant to let them get away with it?!"

"No." Hannibal's maroon eyes snapped to the redhead with as soft an expression as he could muster. "They will not be getting away with it, I assure you."

Abigail pushed off the wall beside the door then and gestured at Hannibal while addressing the redhead. "Look what he did to everybody else who hurt us. He's like our own personal angel now. 'Cause they're not getting away with it. He's just saying it'll be dealt with quietly."

Hannibal didn't know he agreed with the word angel, assassin or demon might have been more apt, and he certainly wasn't theirs but rather Will's. Still, Abigail's comment, though bloody, had allowed Hannibal to ingratiate himself in their minds and solidify the idea he was one of them. From the look on Abigail's face, she'd realized the same thing – 'A peculiar girl and possibly a dangerously intelligent one' said his brain quietly.

Will stepped forward. "If you won't listen to Hannibal, listen to me. I came here when I was fifteen because my dad was a drunk and disgusted his son was an omega. I had no family to go back to, but Hannibal saved me and loved me and did all of this for *me*. Some of you do have families that miss you, so is keeping to an edited version of where you've been really that much to bear? I know you want revenge, I do too, and we'll get it. We'll just get it without courts or camera crews being involved."

"Probably better courts aren't involved." That had curious expressions turn to Alana. "The alphas who came here were influential people, if we expose them to the world they'll bury us all and swan out of any court they make it to with smirks. At least this way we'll actually get some justice."

Ultimately it seemed the omegas and three remaining betas were inclined to agree with Alana. She nor Hannibal were quite sure what edited truth they'd spin yet, but between them they could come up with something entirely believable.

Barney cleared his throat. "What about those who don't have anywhere to go?"

That was a valid question. Some had been sold by their so-called loved ones or had been plucked off the streets, even with all the horrors that had gone on inside the House, at least they'd had a roof

over their head and eaten somewhat regularly.

"I can help with that as well. My charity work has left me with quite the stable network and I know I can help you all find housing and even jobs. It'll be slow, but it can be done. Or, I suppose you can stay here if you want."

Stay there? Was Alana serious? Hannibal had intended on burning the place to the ground once everybody had cleared out, not turning it into a halfway house for lost omegas. However, Will instantly perked up at the idea and leaned in to whisper to Hannibal.

"Could we do that? This place is big and isolated. Here they'd be safe."

"Will, it's not a hostel. Besides, I'm not even sure if someone technically owns this land or not. Those alphas all know where the House is and may use it to their advantage."

Will shrugged. "They won't be around for long and Jimmy said they don't actually know where the House is, just a general area and one of the guards would meet them to escort them. Please, Hannibal? Maybe the House can be something good for a change, something Claude and Veronique can be proud of instead of fear."

Damn Will's logical reasoning and needy omega eyes that tugged on Hannibal's heart strings. It wasn't a wise idea, filled with dangers and much more hassle than it was worth, but Will had such enthusiasm for this and Hannibal had never been able to deny him.

# Chapter 2

In the following month some very serious things had happened at the House. Hannibal and Alana had come up with their edited version of the truth which had put the majority of the blame on Mason Verger; he'd already had an extensive list of suspected criminal acts that law enforcement hadn't been able to prove, so they'd not done much to fact check the new story. It had sounded believable and, since all the omegas who wanted to leave had agreed to go along with it, the stories had all matched up without sounding excessively rehearsed. Having transported them all to the Verger estate to fake them escaping from there had solidified the story, then Alana had insisted on taking over the recovery of the omegas via her charity, and which psychiatrist had been called in to help them all through their therapy, why Doctor Hannibal Lecter of course. Publicly it had been a tragic story that saw little media since nobody involved with the House had made a statement and police had only provided an official one without releasing names, so journalists hadn't had much choice but to abandon the story – especially after the Chesapeake Ripper had struck again.

Two cameras and Price pretending all was normal had done them some good as well. Of course, in the first few weeks, none of the clients had known what had happened at the House so they'd continued to show up as they usually would. While alarming for the recently released omegas, Hannibal and Price had come up with a fairly simple plan for that. Cameras would alert them to an arriving alpha, Josh would meet them and escort them up to the House as was perfectly normal, then Price would calmly state whichever omega they'd come to see had been moved to a new room. As soon as the alpha stepped inside they'd simply lock the door and leave them their for Hannibal to deal with later; a surprisingly simple yet effective tactic which had killed off a good fifteen percent of the clients easily. Collectively, the omegas and surviving betas had known all the other alpha's by at least one name, and some had been fairly easy to track down, but a single month wouldn't rid the world of all who'd ever stepped foot in the House, these things would take time and patience Hannibal had in abundance.

As expected, the vast majority of the omegas had chosen to return to their families with Alana's help, but a few had opted to stay for one reason or another. That had left the surviving beta guards, who'd felt obligated to help rebuild what they could after so many years of perpetuating Jack's violence, and five omegas including Abigail. Akari, a young Japanese-American girl of about Will's age who'd hardly said two words since her rescue. Rex, the only other male omega at the House aside from Will and Brian. A surprisingly artistic girl of about twenty-six named Fern, and Rosalie who frankly acted more like one of the beta guards than a timid omega. Alana popped in and out, she'd slipped right into helping everybody like a counsellor regardless of her own traumas. Abigail was the one who interested Hannibal the most though, there was something eerily familiar about that girl, murder and death clearly wasn't an alien concept to her, but he suspected her reason for staying was to be with Will more than because she lacked a place to go. Will felt fatherly toward her and, by the end of that first month, Hannibal had to admit he'd begun to feel the same. Will wasn't that much older than Abigail, just a handful of years, but they'd still formed their own father-daughter connection which transcended age or blood.

Looking into who owned the land the House sat on had taken a while, Hannibal had needed to dig out records and make numerous phone calls, but had eventually concluded it was government owned and had just been abandoned so long they'd forgotten about it. That both explained how Jack had been able to use it so long without repercussions and proved they'd not have any savage alpha show up determined to reclaim the House and get it back in working order. Hannibal knew he'd eventually need to look into buying it from the government, but he'd do that once everything with

the other omegas had totally quieted down and a few more of the paying alphas had been removed from the planet. At least everyone remaining at the House wouldn't go hungry with all the meals Hannibal brought them.

Exactly when in the first month Jack's office had officially become Hannibal's was unknown. He'd not desired it but he seemed to have been installed as the de facto leader be that because he had torn down the old regime or simply because Hannibal was the only alpha. Truthfully, had it not been for Will's urge to do something good with the House, Hannibal would have gracefully handed everything over to Alana and gotten on with his life. Still, some charity work couldn't have been that terrible. That was how he'd ended up having Barney and Josh clear out the office and repair the door, then he'd brought in a few things to make the office usable if nothing else; not as ornate as he liked, but functional and free of dust and cheep clutter. Alana had come to him with the idea of allowing the decoration of the whole House after that, nothing extensive but enough to keep the place from feeling like a prison again. Placing a few rugs and bringing in some more comfortable chairs didn't seem like much of an issue to Hannibal so he'd allowed it on the condition these items were moved by Price and Barney subtly. Frankly, having the betas remove the chains and magnetic locks on the bedrooms had done more than any rug ever could. Alana's desire to make the House more homely and hide the horrors that had happened there was what gave Hannibal the idea to turn a large storeroom behind the reception desk into a dining room, there he could encourage everyone to enjoy his cooking and watch with quiet amusement as dead alphas sustained them.

~X~

It was upon Hannibal's return from the basement that he stumbled across Fern snivelling in the corner quietly. Poor girl's eyes had gone red and she seemed to be doing her best to pretend she wasn't there.

"Is everything all right, Fern?" Hannibal's voice startled her and had Fern back up a few steps until she hit the wall. She apologized out of habit, some automatic nicety she couldn't turn off. "You have nothing to be sorry for, it was I who startled you. Please, tell me what has upset you so."

"Do – do you know why I'm called Fern?" A ridiculous question, of course Hannibal didn't nor did he particularly care to. "My mom used to go on woodland walks, loved the outdoors. There were fern plants everywhere."

"Some things are so important to us we have our children carry them throughout their lives. My daughter is named after my sister, for example."

"Veronique?" Fern questioned as the tears finally slowed.

"No," replied Hannibal with a shake of his head. "Her middle name, Mischa. Will has a similar feeling for Claude's middle name. Hansel reminds Will of a happy memory with Beverly."

"I never knew my dad and my mom is gone. All I have is a plant, I liked plants."

"Fern, I suspect this is about something other than your name. If you do not tell me, I cannot help you."

Silence lingered for a moment as Fern wiped tears from her red cheeks and Hannibal mentally decided what to make for dinner.

"Everyone who stayed is doing something useful. I'm just the plant girl, how is that helpful? I'm useless."

Hannibal thought for a moment, he might not have wished to be placed in charge of the House, but that was the role he'd found himself with and Hannibal Lecter did not do things by halves.

"How about this?" He asked while gesturing out one of the few actual windows in the concrete building to the forest clearing behind. "Alana is intent on updating the décor, of creating something more liveable. I'm sure she'd delight in the idea of a garden." Busy work, Hannibal knew exactly what he was doing but idle hands led to problems he'd have rather not dealt with, and surely making the House less dreary would be good for everybody involved. "Nothing extensive, you can go at your own pace."

Gray eyes stared out the dirty window suspiciously for a few seconds, while the idea of being able to grow things again sounded heavenly to Fern, something in the back of her mind said this alpha was simply placating her so she'd shut up and let him get on with his day. Of course, that was Hannibal's primary reason, but Will had an idealistic vision of what the House could become and Hannibal never wanted to disappoint his beloved omega.

"Really?"

"Indeed," confirmed Hannibal. "Having something beautiful to look at will lift morale an assist in recovery. Something bright and positive from something dark and evil. I'll speak to Alana about getting you the things you need. All I ask is that you don't work yourself too hard."

A garden might have sounded like such a simple thing, and maybe it was, but it gave those who'd remained something to care for, something to focus on and, ultimately, it would be a constant reminder that Jack Crawford was gone.

"Okay. Okay, I can make us a garden."

Hannibal flashed Fern a smile then departed knowing he had to return Will and the twins home before he went to his office for an appointment.

~X~

Beverly's dark eyes searched around desperately but it was much too dark to see anything clearly. The only sliver of light came from underneath a door, a thin line proving something lay beyond the void. She knew she wasn't alone in the room, the occasional clattering and clinks of chained omegas proved that. Price had promised her there would be some miracle before Mason's right-hand man could haul them away, but that hadn't happened and Beverly couldn't bring herself to be surprised; miracles weren't real.

"Beverly?" Came Brian's quiet voice from the darkness. "Are you awake?"

She nodded only to realize he was just as blind as her. "Yeah."

He shuffled closer then as best his chains would allow until he found her thigh and used that as a guide to her hand.

"I don't get what is happening. I mean, weren't we meant to be some sort of loan for a new version of the House?"

"Think it's pretty clear Jack was lied to, Brian."

That had become rather evident the moment the box truck they'd been stuffed into had come to a stop only for Cordell to be congratulated on his 'new job', that had been the moment they'd all realized he'd jumped ship from Mason to whoever their new owner was. Price had thought they'd be loaned to some guy while he got the Manor up and running – stupid name if one asked Beverly – but it had become clear that had been little more than a ruse, they'd just been pulled out from under Jack. Everything was built on lies, everyone lied to each other and themselves.

"But why?"

Before answers to that could be thought or spoken, shadowy feet appeared in that sliver of light under the door which had any and all conscious omegas freeze to stare. Being chained the darkness wasn't good, but that door opening would surely be worse. Voices talked amongst themselves outside, that strange volume where one knew tone and could differentiate between people but couldn't quite make out what was being said.

"What are they saying?

"Shush, I can't hear."

With Brian being marginally closer to the door, he took it upon himself to stretch as far as his chains would allow and listened intently. Beverly couldn't take the quiet, it hurt, felt strangely loud and left her mind screaming for answers. How could people kidnap and sell omegas so easily? Why was it so damn easy?

"Oh God." Odd how Beverly couldn't see Brian's horrified expression but she could hear it in his voice. "There is no Manor. We're just going to be sold outright.

Jack might have seen repeat customers as a way to bring in constant money, but Marcus Delamare had no time for sitting around pulling in trickles of money. Why bother doing that when he could just sell omegas then kidnap some more to do the same again? Jack had settled in Marcus' mind, Marcus didn't settle.

The revelation they'd all be sold off individually terrified the conscious omegas but one voice – a surprisingly English voice, piped up out of the dark off to Beverly's and Brian's left.

"You've not been through this before, have you?" The Englishman sighed. "I don't want to say you get used to it exactly, but you become familiar with the process. Marcus Delamare runs this place, he's in charge. It's like an auction house. The one with the weird lip is the Dragon – don't mention the lip – he rounds us all up."

"He didn't round us up!" Beverly insisted.

"Then Marcus tricked someone into handing you over, he does that when he gets low on stock."

Brian frowned so deeply it almost made his brow hurt. "How do you know so much about this? Who even are you?"

"Erik." Replied the Englishman without much care. "Like I said, you become familiar with the process. Some of the alphas like to rotate their omegas, so I've been through here before. My advice is to look as shy as possible, the more sympathetic monsters might take a liking to you."

Beverly's mouth fell open. " 'More sympathetic monsters' ? That's not a thing. They're all soulless."

"That's not true, D is nice enough to me."

That fourth voice came from the very back of the room and had sounded so bizarrely calm that it had actually stunned Brian and Beverly.

Erik sighed. "That's because you're blind, Reba. No one knew that when they took you and now nobody will buy you. There's no point beating you because you couldn't escape even if you wanted to and Marcus won't abide merchandise being tossed out."

A blind omega? Was anything sacred in this world? Sometimes Beverly wished humans hadn't evolved with alpha, beta and omega dynamics or that only betas existed. Terrible inhumane things would still happen, but at least everybody would have been on the same playing field. Maybe there wasn't any point focusing on that, it was just a silly fantasy after all the same way Price's planned rescue of them all had been.

The metal door finally opened then and a tall dark-haired man entered. The light which followed him in blinded Beverly and the other omegas, caused them to blink rapidly and try to shield their sensitive eyes. Dolarhyde, had to be judging by his face. He carried a battered clipboard and clearly wasn't in the mood for mercy.

"First batch of five," he announced without looking up from the clipboard. "One, four, nine, thirteen and twenty."

Two alphas burst into the room then and began hauling the called omegas out of kicking and screaming. It was only then they realized they all had bits of tape stuck to their clothes with numbers written in biro. Twenty just so happened to be Brian's number.

"You can't do this!" Beverley screamed but went entirely ignored.

It was as though Dolarhyde hadn't even heard her, as though he were in his own little world, or at least it was until he spotted Reba sitting quietly at the back of the room. An actual emotion passed across his face then but Beverly disregarded it because alphas felt nothing but their own sadistic glee.

Brian and the four other omegas were dragged into a side room, stripped of all their clothing then shoved along a narrow hallway to somewhere that looked like the back of a stage. 'Are we in an abandoned theatre?' he asked himself when he finally came to a stop. One by one they were forced out onto the stage lit by fluorescent lights and auctioned off by who Brian could only assume was Marcus himself. By the time his turn rolled around the constant buzzing of those fluorescent lights had become a constant taunt. So bright, they lit his naked form up almost with glee while blinding

Brian to the alphas out in the crowd. Suddenly the House didn't seem that bad, and that place had been hell on earth.

The man assumed to be Marcus gestured to him with an over the top smile. "This one goes by the name Brian, he's of Italian-American heritage, five-ten, and still has some fight in him but knows how to follow orders. He's had only one other owner, but that owner was prone to prostituting him. Shall we begin the bidding at ten thousand? Do I see ten thousand?"

Ten thousand dollars? Was that all he was worth? Was that a lot or a little when it came to human trafficking? How much did people pay for other people? Brian had no clue, he'd just been a dumb college kid who'd yearned to get into forensics when he'd been abducted. Jimmy, he missed Jimmy. Sure, if they'd met in some other innocent way, Brian might not have looked twice at the older man, but they hadn't met in an innocent way and Brian had gotten to know him; knew Jimmy was prone to stupid jokes and dumb laughs, knew the debts his father had left him with and stress of bing a guard had resulted in a bit of a drinking problem; knew Jimmy loved him. More importantly, Brian knew he loved Jimmy. These alphas were willing to spend ridiculous quantities of money for an unwilling omega's body, but Brian's love couldn't be bought.

The bidding continued and Brian remembered what Erik had said about looking shy; seemed that ship had sailed. He hoped whatever rescue attempt his love had been planning had worked because, even if he never experienced freedom again, at least others at the House might. He didn't know how much he eventually sold for, if Marcus was pleased with the profit brought in or even which alpha had won him, maybe none of it mattered – as usual he was just merchandise.

# Chapter 3

Not long after Brian had been ripped away from Beverly, his only remaining friend, and sold like common merchandise, he'd been stuffed into the trunk of a SUV with all the care and respect one would provide a bag of laundry. Other than the metal cable tie binding his wrists, Brian had been left naked and cold. Everything had gone black when the trunk closed locking him away in a silent void yet again. Logically he knew he should have been frightened, but his body just couldn't muster the energy anymore. He'd been beaten, raped, treated like cattle and ripped from the only person he'd ever truly loved; Brian wasn't really anything but exhausted now. Traumas piled upon traumas.

The SUV moved quickly and spared no thought to him being bounced around inside the dark trunk like a rag doll. Some kind of canvas bag containing something solid jabbed him in the back each time they went over a bump, a minor inconvenience compared to some of the beatings he'd been subjected to over the years.

For – he didn't even know how long, he thought of his fiends under Dolarhyde's watch, of how their fates would certainly turn out just like his, of how much pain Price must have felt for being unable to rescue him. If he closed his eyes and focused hard enough, he could feel the beta's arms snake around him smell of him appeared in his nose. He'd always clung to a little fantasy of escaping the House with his beloved beta and the two of them becoming mates, maybe even having a child one day. Sure, it was a little harder for an omega and beta to have a pup, but Brian would have been happy to try. A pipe dream, that was all it was, a silly fantasy the wouldn't ever come true, but it had made him so happy for a little while.

Those metal cable ties dug deep into the flesh of his wrists bruising and cutting as Brian tried to hold on to Price's scent. He'd almost certainly never see his true mate again, but at least he'd had him in his life for a short time, a brief flicker of light in an otherwise dark nightmare.

After what must have been at least ninety minutes, the SUV came to a stop on a gravel path – Brian had been able to tell by the rocky crackling noise – and hauled back out into the cold night air. While his skin instantly chilled and called out for warm clothing, his lungs were grateful for fresh air, it had gotten so stuffy and hard to breathe inside the trunk. Brian had thought he'd no more fear to give, but one look at his new owner's harsh eyes had forced his body to scrounge up more. A length of rope went around his neck like a leash, then Brian was tugged towards a large pink house – the sort of pink a savage alpha would have insisted was salmon. A glance behind him showed Brian that gravel path was actually a long driveway setting the house far from a road. 'Locked inside an isolated house again, have these alphas run out of ideas?' Frankly, it had started to feel like locking innocent people up somewhere that wouldn't draw attention really was the best they could come up with. Then again, in Brian's experience, all alphas could only think with their knots.

"Welcome to Chesapeake Beach." Well, that explained the salty smell to the air.

His so-called owner yanked Brian by the upper arm into the house – a showy place heavily focused on minimalism – and into what was probably a living room. Compared to the House, this place was damn right cosy, but décor didn't matter when one knew a cage was always a cage no matter how nice it looked.

"Kneel," Demanded the auburn-haired alpha in a voice which left no room for argument.

Brian wanted to refuse, wanted to spit in his face and flee into the arms of the man he loved, but that was yet another fantasy. Regardless of all his cruel evils, Jack had at least protected the omegas from being beaten totally to death by alphas, there wasn't anything to stop that now, this new alpha could have spent all that money just to torture him to death for all Brian knew. So, even though he hated himself for it, Brian obeyed and knelt down on the hardwood floor. The alpha circled him, a wolf eyeing his prey with sharp teeth. He'd been naked the whole time but only under that man's scrupulous gaze did want to curl in on himself to cover his shame. When the alpha came to a stop behind him everything in Brian screamed to run – not that there was anywhere to run to. He squeezed his eyes shut expecting pain, instead the cable ties were snipped letting Brian's hands slump forward limply and and numb.

"What was your name, little omega?"

This dude had spent all that money on him and hadn't even retained his name? Brian suspected he probably shouldn't have been surprised.

"… Brian."

"How boring," said the alpha with a sigh. "I am Johannes Marsden. You will address me as sir only, no other names will be tolerated. Do you understand?"

He nodded. "Yes, sir."

Marsden smiled smugly above him. "Good boy." A large alpha hand stroked through Brian's black hair, it was a little greasy but Brian had long ago grown used to that feeling. "I shall allow you to only wear your underwear, nothing else unless I tell you to. Understand?" Another nod. "We can't have that pretty figure hidden under clothes, can we?"

"No, sir."

That had Marsden chuckle as though all of this were a polite conversation as part of a job interview. Brian had planned for his life to be very different, he'd wanted to investigate crime scenes and help catch the bad guys, he'd wanted to *be* someone and something other than his dynamic.

"You learn quickly." He finally rounded Brian to stand before him. "Now, I've spent a lot of money on you. I've given you a nice home to live in and I think that warrants some gratitude, don't you? Get on with it then."

Brian swallowed the lump in his throat, he supposed in the grand scheme of things this barbaric alpha could have demanded of him or done to him, a blow job was on the kinder side. Knowing what would happen if he hesitated too long, Brian shuffled towards Marsden and worked his belt open with numb fingers. His cock sprung forward eagerly from his pants in a way that momentarily reminded him of Chilton – a disgusting memory he'd have rather left in the depths of his mind. With little other option, Brian took Marsden into his mouth and wasn't surprised when hands soon gripped the back of his head or when Marsden began to fuck into his mouth violently.

He'd not even done this with Price, they'd never had time to do more than steal kisses when nobody was looking – even if they'd found time Price likely would have just thought himself taking advantage of Brian. Dissociation took over then, Brian let his mind wander off into that lovely fantasy of his where he was mated to a beta that loved him and talks of having a family had started. That was the world Brian wanted to exist, that was the world Brian longed for, that was a world full of goodness and light, and that was why it was a fantasy.

~X~

With the House's basement cleared out of all the dead bodies and Gideon's so-called clinic, Barney had brought in an old television and a selection of DVDs as entertainment for the omegas; wasn't much of a surprise when the basement had become known as the media room not long afterwards. Some old DVDs might have seemed trivial to the likes of Hannibal, but it was no small thing for the omegas who'd stayed, this was the first time they could not only move freely around the House but make their own choices and be entertained. One who'd spent the most time down there was Abigail, while she'd tried to help out like the other omegas, Abigail was the youngest and therefore finding it the hardest to lose such a constant routine. She'd stepped into freedom unaware of how many unknowns went in hand with it, and that had frightened her. Fifteen, she was fifteen but had refused Alana's attempts to get her placed with a foster family. Despite all the dark memories it held, the House was her home.

Amongst the – startlingly random – selection were a few nature documentaries, these were the ones she'd watch over and over again while keeping an eye on the twins. Babysitting seemed to be one of the few tasks around the House she actually enjoyed – not that Will let Claude and Veronique out of his sight for more than five minutes at a time, and Hannibal wasn't really a fan of bringing them along but there wasn't anyone else trusted to care for them. A big sister, that was the vibe Abigail gave off when she watched them. Something needed to be done about Abigail's state of mind, she couldn't go on isolating herself in the basement. However, she seemed to only trust or listen to Will. Maybe Hannibal would speak to him about it. Before all that he had to finish his work with the omegas who'd returned to the world. Just as with Miriam Lass, he'd set about conditioning them though in a much more friendly fashion. Serving as Omega Lives' therapist for them had given him more than enough access to get the job done and done it had to be; he couldn't risk so many loose ends suddenly growing a conscience or slipping up and revealing something to media or law enforcement. Killing them would have been easier, preferred, buy Will wanted them all to live so continue to struggle along Hannibal did.

~X~

Price had an idea. A reckless and stupid one that was a bit of a long shot, but it remained an idea nonetheless. He missed Brian, there wasn't any hiding or escaping that, things weren't all sunshine and rainbows simply because Jack Crawford and Mason Verger had been sent to hell. Each day without Brian's smug smiles and quips felt like a dagger pushed further into his heart. The man he loved had been stolen away from him and Price hadn't been able to do a damn thing! Why was it only Will who got a genuine happy ending? Had God run out of miracle dust or something?

As he ascended the stairs lost in thought he found Will coming down them so they sort of met in the middle. His face was flushed and his hair a messier mop of curls than usual – 'Hannibal's new office finally got christened then'. A happy and satisfied omega wasn't a common sight at the House.

"Hey, Will." Grumbled Price as the two came to a stop in the stairwell.

"Hi, Jimmy." Will's voice was still a little breathless. "Have you seen Abigail and the twins?"

"They're in the basement right where you left them. She's watching that documentary on deer again."

Will let out a little hum at that, wondered if maybe he should encourage her to go outside and help Fern to plant the seedlings Alana had gotten her. With a quick thank you, Will went on his merry

way leaving Price alone in his misery. He wasn't stupid, knew Will hadn't gotten over his trauma so quickly, but still felt a spark of anger over the entire situation. Will could at least take steps to work through his dark past while Brian and Beverly were fuck knew where. Price did his best to calm himself, his anger toward Will was misplaced and unhelpful. So he carried on up the stairs until he came to the office everybody had just sort of assumed was Hannibal's now. He knocked politely on the new door then stepped inside to find Hannibal packing his medical case back up. No one would have guessed he'd just been intimate with his omega – unlike Will, Hannibal didn't have so much as a hair out of place.

"Hello, Jimmy." The alpha hardly glanced at the beta before retuning to cleaning up his things. "I've finished my medical examinations of the omegas. They'll be ill for a short time while the concoctions of drugs Gideon had them on is flushed from their systems, but they'll be significantly healthier afterwards. They're all malnourished as expected, but some nutritional meals will soon clear that up. I would ask that you watch Rex though, he fell from a ladder earlier today while assisting Barney to make the House a little more habitable. Rex has a very mild concussion."

"Yeah," he nodded. "I'll keep an eye on him. Alana is really serious about turning this place into a proper shelter for omegas?"

"She is indeed." Hannibal finally closed his medical case and turned to fully face the beta. "Alana is a smart woman who has now experienced one of the more horrific things facing omegas today. She's determined to cease the opportunity to make the House's evil a thing of the past and I commend her for it. In fact, later this afternoon, I will be assisting her with plans to purchase the land from the government."

"I suppose that's probably for the best. If you or Omega Lives own the place there's less chance of cops busting in her and accusing us of trespassing."

"We reached that conclusion as well. I've also found myself added to the charity's management." Hannibal had donated to charities numerous times over his life, it supported his reputation and all went to a worthy cause, but he'd not expected to become quite so involved. Alana and the others had just assumed he had taken over the House since he'd been the one to kill Jack and due to him being the only alpha; something Will had encouraged. "I suspect this has turned into a pet project for Alana, a deflection which can be indulged for now."

It had to be assumed that owning the land and getting it recognized for its connection to Omega Lives would dissuade those with ill intentions from showing their faces. Of course, by this point anybody familiar with the House who hadn't been killed in the initial attack or purged in the following few weeks when they'd shown up intent on what Josh had uncouthly referred to as 'sexy fun times'. Those who remained had all either cut their losses and backed away to avoid any public connection should word get out, or already found themselves at the end of Hannibal's blade – he had a lot more people to feed after all.

"I know. She said she wanted to list me, Barney and Josh as employees soon. Would be nice to have some money for a change. Suppose I don't need to pay back that debt my dad owed Jack now."

"I'd doubt it." Hannibal agreed with a casual tone before he perched on the edge of his desk. "You did not come all the way up here just to tell me that though, Jimmy, what else is there?"

Price knew he was thankful for Hannibal, the alpha was smart, dependable and, though clearly a murderer, he had a sense of morality to him. Maybe Price had just slotted things neatly into boxes so he could better justify his part in all those deaths.

"Well, I had an idea to help us find Brian and the others." Price vacillated a moment. "I'm not even sure it'll help but it's better than nothing, I guess."

"Why don't you tell me this idea of yours before we discredit it?"

A valid idea, Price supposed, so he nodded and explained himself while fidgeting with his hands.

"Okay, so, the moment Jack mentioned loaning out omegas so his business partner, Marcus, could set up another House, I thought it sounded crazy. There are brothels everywhere and the House was used by some very shady people who could have been funnelled here rather than establishing some new hellhole elsewhere. Then I overheard Cordell talking to Mason before he left with them. It was strange – like he knew Jack wouldn't get them back. Cordell said something odd though. At the time I didn't think much of it, but now I'm not so sure." When Hannibal simply looked at him expectantly, Price continued. "Cordell said: 'pretty ones will get the buyers riled up'. All I know about Marcus is he's got money, I'm starting to think he makes that money by omega trafficking."

Hannibal had to admit that he'd started to wonder about the validity of this alleged Manor, he'd questioned some of those he'd managed to hunt down and they'd had no knowledge of it. The House was an isolated case, the fact it had been active as long as it had was likely down to a string of good fortune and well placed threats, something like that wouldn't have been sustainable elsewhere; abandoned buildings intact enough and hidden from satellite view didn't grow on trees. Price's theory – well, it made a lot of sense. Omega trafficking was a horrible part of life and something else Hannibal hadn't intended to get himself involved with.

"I'm inclined to agree with you. This Marcus you spoke of is illusive though and I'm unsure of how to track him down currently."

"That's where my idea comes in." Announced the beta almost cutting Hannibal off. "I can do some research. I worked for Jack for a while and I've been taken on a few of Mason's jobs, I might be able to eke something new out of the idiots working for some of Jack's old contacts. One of them has to know about Marcus or if he really is auctioning off omegas."

"While I admire your bravery and determination, I suspect you can only get so far. Please do not take this as an insult, but you are a beta who worked for a man they all know has been killed and his business torn down. If you push too hard then all you'll succeed in doing is drawing unnecessary attention to yourself."

Price sighed deeply and drug a hand down his face. "I appreciate that, Hannibal, I really do, but I'm not seeing any better ideas here. You have Will, he's not going anywhere. He's in the basement right now cooing over your kids. He's happy and safe and mated and *here*!"

"While Brian is still suffering." Hannibal finished for him. "Yes, I fully understand and I wasn't suggesting we simply cut our losses. You and I worked together before, that is why taking the House went as smoothly as it did."

"You got shot." Price pointed out with a deadpan expression which had the corners of Hannibal's mouth upturn momentarily.

"I was. However, our mission was successful due to our cooperation. I'm not dismissing your idea, just intending to alter it a little. Just 'casing the joint' as you'd say doesn't seem totally wise. Try to get close to those of lower rank who may have a connection to this Marcus person, use the lie that you need a job now Jack is gone, play up your debts even though Jack's death has wiped them out.

You are already experienced with keeping omegas captive and have worked here for many years, that all suggests you were competent and trusted to some extent. Doing that will make it safer for you to learn about Marcus' operation and report back to me. This isn't like Jack, we can't destroy him in a single night." Price asked about the 'cooperation' part of Hannibal's speech then. They'd worked together before because they'd had precious little choice, maybe they had little choice now as well. "My name hasn't been connected to the House in media or legal documents, as far as a man like Marcus can tell, I have nothing to do with this place. What he can tell with just a few checks is that I'm respected in my field and community, wealthy and of noble blood."

"Noble blood?"

"I'm a count."

Price lifted an eyebrow. 'A count? Count Lecter?' Yeah, because Lithuanian counts were known for wandering around the woods of Wolf Trap to chat with betas and murder brothel-keepers. What truly amazed Price was how nonchalantly Hannibal had mentioned it, like it wasn't something of any importance or even noteworthy. What did that make Will? He was Hannibal's mate – a lord maybe, or possibly a viscount? The silver-haired man shook his head, none of that was even remotely important there and then. Hannibal could have been king of some far off land and it have made no difference to Brian's and Beverly's situation.

"Why does you being rich and respected help us?"

"Because it will allow me to blend in at auctions rather seamlessly. We will work together again, just as we have been doing this whole time. You will attempt to take employment with Marcus' people and learn his last name. Once you have, I shall attend his auctions. If your friends and intended mate can be reclaimed simply by me buying them, then I shall."

Things had already gone too swimmingly for them with the House, just buying back their friends didn't seem like something that would actually happen. Marcus probably sold omegas as fast as was physically possible – though Jack's death might have slowed his haste a little bit.

"What if Brian and the others have been sold?"

"These auctions, if that is what Marcus is doing, won't be happening every night. Maybe once every other month or even every six months, this buys us some time. If they have been sold then I will … encourage the information out of him." Price had seen Hannibal's encouragement before, so knew it to be exceedingly effective. "Perhaps he is a meticulous businessman who keeps records somewhere."

Will pushed the office door open then and entered without a care for their conversation. He had Claude in his arms while Abigail trailed behind him with Veronique.

"Everything all right?" Asked Will as he made his way over to Hannibal for a kiss.

"Fine, brangusis. We were just discussing our plans to find Brian and Beverly."

That perked Will up instantly and Abigail right alongside him. "You know where they are? You can get them back?"

Price shook his head. "No, but it's better than nothing. Hannibal wants us to attack from both ends as it were. I'll play the grunt and he'll be the sexy rich guy."

Abigail teased: "So roles you're both rather suited to."

"It will feel stagnant at times, but I believe this to be our best option. The Manor was a lie told to Jack so Marcus could acquire some new omegas quickly just as we'd all suspected. Auctions will be where he makes his money."

Claude stretched out intent on getting his alpha father's attention by waggling Buckley in his face, Hannibal just smiled and took his son into his arms. There wasn't any denying who'd sired the twins. They might have had Will's dark hair but those eyes and cheekbones were all Hannibal. Even after he'd gotten used to seeing it, the sight of Hannibal holding a baby did something to Will; something he couldn't quite describe or want to acknowledge properly; perhaps having another pup wouldn't be so bad.

"Will you kill them?" Abigail's blunt question drew everybody's attention to her as she rocked Veronique. "They're monsters, they deserve to die."

Price opened his mouth to dissuade Abigail's murderous desires, but Hannibal spoke first. He could see the cape of darkness around the teenager just as he could the ones around Will and himself. Abigail was something unique and special, something Hannibal found himself drawn to in much the same way Will had. That fatherly feeling had returned.

"You are correct, Abigail. Letting them live will only allow them to rebuild or retaliate. Ending their lives is the safest and most logical course of action, an action I shan't be denied." He walked the few steps to stand before Abigail then and gazed upon her with those maroon eyes of his. This man truly was every omega's dream alpha; tall, handsome, wealthy, strong, loving and, above all, would eliminate any threat that came near his family. He cupped her cheek forcing Abigail to look at him properly. "I promise you, Abigail, they will suffer."

She smiled. Her memories of her family were murky and littered with missing fragments, she had been kidnapped by Mason at the age of nine after all, but she knew the alpha before her and her father were cut from the same cloth, and she found that … comforting.

# Chapter 4

Things had moved quickly after the meeting in Hannibal's office at the House. Alana had begun determining a new layout for certain sections to make them more functional as a home for unfortunate omegas with Rex's help. Everyone had left her to it mostly because they could all see this was her way of working through the things that had happened to her inside the House, if she had all the walls painted, more windows and doors put in then the past wouldn't be as easy to see. Price had stopped coming in as often to keep him separate from the place while he wormed his way in with the lowlifes associated with Marcus' people. Meanwhile, Hannibal had made another kill. This time Charles Panzram who'd inflicted so much sadistic violence on Alana and other innocent omegas unlucky enough to catch his eye. With him, Hannibal had crafted a roast fit for a king which Abigail had likened to Thanksgiving by the time Hannibal had set it all out in the dining room. Thanksgiving wasn't something Hannibal had ever really done before since he was Lithuanian and had no family to invite over, throwing a dinner party for such an occasion hadn't seemed on par with his usual class either. However, he did have a family now and these meals he'd been serving to those at the House had become a more informal version of his dinner parties, so he concluded Abigail hadn't exactly been wrong. The other thing Hannibal had busied himself with was wining and dining the few names Price had managed to connect to possible omega auctions, it hadn't yielded much information, but it had got his name travelling the sort of circles that might have earned him an invite.

Still, casual meals and holidays weren't that important for him, not when Price had asked Hannibal to meet him having claimed to find the motherlode. Curious, and after insisting Will stayed put at home with the twins, Hannibal had travelled to the park where he found Price perched on a lone bench. Meeting in a public space had been their go-to since Price's – for lack of a better term – undercover work had begun. Wandering through a park at three in the afternoon didn't look suspicious the way slipping into isolated rooms and abandoned parking lots at night were. Children ran around on a grassy area to their right while dog walkers moved about at various speeds; there was even one couple walking ferrets over by the pond. Hannibal looked down to his hand holding Winston's black leash then to the animal himself. Even Hannibal wasn't sure if Will had insisted the dog accompanied him for some sort of perceived safety reason or just because Winston had needed a walk and the park sounded nice. Regardless, the dog was with him now and probably assisting in that non-suspicious vibe they'd all wanted.

"What is so urgent, Jimmy?" He asked as he sat down.

"Well," Price fidgeted with his hands in his lap. "I did good. I got in pretty quickly because Marcus has a real high turn over for staff." Nobody needed exactly what the reason for that turnover was, a man like Marcus couldn't keep people around who knew too much without a good reason. "There's an old warehouse he uses when not actively auctioning omegas and things are getting tight for him. Cops in other states are trying to crush his operation. You're not getting into the warehouse, it's too heavily defended. There's a theatre he uses to hold the auctions themselves, abandoned unless he's using it. I think that, if we stand a chance of getting Brian and the others back, that is where we'd have to stage something. There are too many people though. Marcus focuses on security rather than privacy like Jack did."

"You're not sounding particularly optimistic, Jimmy." A large hand stretched out to pet Winston's head. "Since I know you wouldn't ever give up on Brian, I assume there is more."

Price nodded. "I can't really do anything more. I'm just a lowly beta guard who isn't trusted. We need someone higher up the proverbial food chain."

"And that's what the alpha looming in the trees behind us is all about then." Hannibal concluded.

Price's eyes went wide; he'd known the alpha was there but he'd not thought Hannibal would notice or be so damn casual about it. When he actually paused to think about it, the whole situation would have been more surprising if Hannibal *hadn't* noticed. When Price had called the meeting he'd not really been sure what the outcome would be, hoping for the best had basically been all he could do. Hannibal and Price had originally begun working together out of necessity, Hannibal had needed an inside man while Price had required someone capable of taking on so many people, things were different now though. Being mated to Will was what kept Hannibal perpetuating his connection to the House and offering his assistance, but that didn't mean he'd not suddenly take Will away never to be seen again. Honesty; being straight with the handsome doctor was probably the best tactic.

"There's em – Well, I brought someone with me for you to meet. He's strange, I'll admit that, but I think he's the only one open to helping us."

"Define strange." Commanded the suit-clad alpha.

Price shuffled in his seat. "To put it simply, I think he's either on drugs or needs to be. Pretty sure he's hallucinating sometimes. You're a doctor, maybe quietly make an assessment of the guy."

"And why did you feel the need to reveal yourself to him? What is to stop him reporting straight back to Marcus?"

Birds chirped up in the trees as Winston settled down at Hannibal's feet. People continued to wander passed them totally unaware of the monsters in their midst.

"I – I didn't really have much choice. He found me snooping around – I thought he'd kill me but, when I happened to mention I knew who'd killed Jack and taken down the House in a single night, he calmed down. I think he was impressed, started talking about wanting to meet you."

Ah, so that was how this little picnic had come about. Price wasn't exactly wrong, the two of them weren't enough to crush Marcus' operation no matter how lucky they got. An inside man had been why things had gone so smoothly the night Jack had been killed, having one inside Marcus' operation would be most beneficial as well. All that said, Price hadn't sounded all that sure about the alpha in the trees, clearly thought him dangerous and something of a loose cannon, but Hannibal could be manipulative when he wanted to be – that reminded him, Miriam might finally be of some use to him at the House.

"Very well," began Hannibal as he brushed non-existent lint from his sleeve. "Call the alpha over so we may speak."

Price didn't need telling twice, just spun around on the bench to the small crop of trees to beckon the other alpha over. Hannibal felt him approach, felt the alpha loom ever closer until he was directly behind the bench staring intently at the back of Hannibal's head. Normally Hannibal prided himself on his manners, would have stood to shake his fellow alpha's hand, but this situation needed hierarchy rather than polite greeting; a necessary rudeness.

"This is Francis Dolarhyde," informed Price after clearing his throat. "Francis, this is Doctor Hannibal Lecter, the alpha I told you about."

"Jimmy, I'm afraid Winston has grown rather bored. Kindly take him on a loop of the pond, please?"

They all knew the beta was being dismissed and Price didn't object, he had no desire to sit between two powerful alphas while they discussed murder and quietly threatened each other. So, after a muttered affirmative, Price took Winston's leash and headed off toward the path by the pond.

"I'm an admirer of your work, Doctor Lecter." The dark-haired alpha rounded the bench to sit where Price had been a moment earlier. "I think we're similar."

"Oh Mister Dolarhyde, Jack Crawford is just the tip of the iceberg of my 'work'. As for being similar, I can see one way in which we are, but I think we're probably more different than alike."

Dolarhyde chuckled and looked out across the park, Hannibal used this momentary opportunity to take in the other alpha's face. Fairly handsome and well built, younger than himself but without the same imposing aura. Cleft lip surgery probably performed long after the emotional damage had been done and instinct told Hannibal that Price had been onto something when he'd mentioned drugs, though Hannibal's professional opinion led him to believe it was the latter bit that applied. From the way he held himself and had lingered so quietly in the trees, Hannibal assumed a military background. Shy. Shy was the main word that kept popping up in Hannibal's mind. Poor boy probably thought himself terribly disfigured. Price had brought Hannibal an interesting one, that was for damn sure. Francis Dolarhyde could be magnificent given a push in the right direction.

"Tip of the iceberg, huh? I guess that's to be expected."

"I'm sure you have your own iceberg, Francis. May I call you Francis?"

All thoughts of the House or Marcus had been forgotten in favor of Hannibal delving into this unusual man's mind. He knew a troubled soul when he saw one and Dolarhyde's was one of the most troubled he'd seen in a long time.

"I'm honored you'd take an interest in me, Doctor Lecter."

Hannibal smiled. "I take an interest in all people who are interesting. Everyone may have that one thing that makes them *not boring*, but very few are truly interesting."

Dolarhyde seemed to agree with that because it finally had him turn to face the older man fully. "We don't start as what we're meant to be, we have to become it first. Maybe uninteresting people just haven't become anything."

"What are you becoming?"

"… The Great Red Dragon."

Hannibal internally beamed, he'd not had a brain this wonderful to rummage around in for years. So that was exactly what he did; rummage. For hours Hannibal and Dolarhyde spoke, they talked of everything from art to Dolarhyde's former job as a film processing technician, and, slowly, Dolarhyde began to grow more talkative. Within the first ninety minutes he'd become enamored with Hannibal allowing the doctor to eke more information regarding his abusive childhood and how an article in TIME magazine had named the voice inside his head and, finally, Reba. Reba was to Dolarhyde as Will was to Hannibal, something solid anchoring them to the world.

Eventually night fell and the park cleared of people, things fell silent and small creatures went to their nests for the night. Killing Marcus Delamare – surname courtesy of the so-called Red Dragon – would take time to plan and prepare for, but Hannibal thought he could use that time to turn Dolarhyde into his pet. The man already idolized him, practically worshipped him after it had clicked in his head that Hannibal was the Chesapeake Ripper, so it wouldn't have been too hard to turn Dolarhyde into a grenade only he could activate. Perhaps Hannibal would even medicate that obvious schizophrenia of his to calm the battle inside his mind.

~X~

When Hannibal finally made it home, it was to a very disgruntled omega. Will had pounced on him almost the second the door had closed behind him to figure out exactly what had kept Hannibal in a park with a stranger so long and made Price feel so uncomfortable.

"Winston's here, by the way," Will grumbled. "Jimmy dropped him off hours ago."

Hannibal hung up his coat. "I am aware, a note was left on my windshield to inform me."

A kiss was pressed to Will's plump lips but it broke much sooner than Hannibal would have liked because Will stepped backward with a frown.

"Don't think you can kiss me and everything is fine again, Hannibal. I'm pissed at you. You were just meant to talk to Jimmy, instead I find you're relaxing with some strange alpha who could have wanted to kill you."

Hannibal couldn't keep the smile off his face, an angry Will was an adorable Will, but jealousy was sweeter still.

"No need for jealousy, my darling boy. While I'll admit I care little for gender or dynamic, he's not my type." Will folded his arms across his chest, clearly not in the mood for his mate's teasing. "Thank you for worrying about me, but I am fine. The man I was speaking with is named Francis Dolarhyde and likely our only way of retrieving your friends."

Will continued to internally grumble even though he knew Hannibal would never cheat on him. He'd seen the way people looked at Hannibal, he was everybody's dream alpha, but he belonged to Will and Will only. The alpha lifted a grumpy Will into his arms then carried him into the living room where Hannibal seated himself in an armchair. Instinctively Will's head went to rest on his mate's shoulder.

"Why do you think this Dolarhyde guy is our only way?"

"Simple. He's worked for Marcus Delamare for a handful of years now so is trusted. He's clearly not happy with his role and is struggling with issues of his own. Then there is Reba. She's a captive omega but he speaks of her with genuine affection and care, Francis clearly wants more with her but knows that will never happen with Marcus around."

"What do you mean by he's 'struggling with issues of his own'?" Questioned Will.

"It took only a few moments of speaking with him for be to suspect he has schizophrenia. Jimmy mentioned thinking he hallucinates and I'm fairly certain he's developed an alternative persona that he called the Great Red Dragon."

Will breathed out a small laugh. "Dramatic."

"Yes, but tells me a great deal about how his mind functions."

"So you spent hours sitting in a park to root around inside the mind of a man with a serious mental illness? Yeah, that tracks for you." Blue eyes tilted upward to look at Hannibal properly. "Are you sure someone like that can be trusted? Some unstable alpha?"

"As I said, mylimasis, there doesn't seem to be any other option. I've offered to meet with Francis at my office, I intend to ease him into therapy and place him on medication. If he takes well to this then I'll likely be able to point him in the directions I want him to go in and, the more loyal and willing to idolize me he becomes, the better. His developing feelings for Reba are stirring powerful emotions up inside him, he's torn between attempting to be a loving alpha and the violent killer that is the Red Dragon. Not to pat myself on the back, but I believe I've balanced being a loving alpha and serial killer rather well, this will be something Francis can learn from me."

Will supposed that all made sense, having a rabid dog on a leash was always preferable to one that had gotten loose. Still, placing all their hopes on Francis Dolarhyde being a good little puppy didn't seem wise to Will. Although, when it came to getting his friends back, Will knew they had to work with what they had. With a nod Will agreed to Hannibal's plan and offered to assist in taming Dolarhyde in anyway he could.

# Chapter 5

The day Hannibal had shown up at the House with Miriam Lass in tow had been a confusing one for those that lived there. Alana had been talking about better security for a while after Price had gone to take care of other things, and it had become an unwritten rule that Hannibal was the only alpha allowed inside the building. So, since his original use for Miriam had died an abrupt death years ago, Hannibal had decided to put her to good use elsewhere. As a beta she didn't breath the unofficial rule and, having been totally conditioned and recalibrated, she couldn't have gone against Hannibal even if she'd wanted to. A perfect little worker bee was Miriam.

That was how he found himself stood in the library with the few remaining omegas and betas, as well as Will, introducing Miriam to them all. The stares were to be expected, she was missing an arm after all, but nobody mentioned how she'd lost it or what having a prosthetic was like.

"Miriam is going to help out around here as part of her therapy." Hannibal stated calmly. "I understand having only two betas present to watch over the building has been somewhat uncomfortable for you all, but I hope Miriam will go some way to helping alleviate that. Jack is gone, there isn't any need for a full security force any longer but an extra person around to alert myself, Will or Alana to an issue is probably for the best."

"Are you okay, Miriam?" Asked Rex with his head cocked to one side. "You seem a bit quiet."

"She's fine." Hannibal assured with that disarming smile of his. "I'm afraid Miriam has gone through some traumas which have left a few minor cognitive problems. She doesn't remember much of her past so please do not probe her."

Miriam squinted a little as she pulled her prosthetic arm closer to her chest in a subconscious attempt to mentally protect herself.

"I'm sorry," she began. "Some things are fuzzy. I'll help where I can though. Doctor Lecter says you need me and I'm happy to help."

Those at the House hadn't needed much more encouragement to accept her. To them, Miriam was simply a young woman who'd suffered, she'd just suffered in a different way to them. Nobody needed to know Hannibal had been the cause of all her suffering, of her mutilation; Miriam herself didn't even know. She was, however, the most loyal person to Hannibal there – except for Will of course – and would report anything of import directly to him automatically. In her mind she'd probably justify it by thinking Hannibal was in charge and therefore needed to be kept abreast of any arising situations, in reality she'd simply been conditioned to Hannibal's perfect little camera.

Will had been unsure of keeping her at the House to begin with, had known she wasn't just a patient and that his mate had certainly been the one to take Miriam's arm, but even Will had been forced to admit she was useful. So, with Will's blessing and the House's residents' welcome, Miriam had been installed at the House as a beta guard with Barney and Josh.

~X~

Hannibal's sessions with Dolarhyde went significantly better than anticipated and soon he'd worked out exactly which buttons to press and how hard. Though incredibly sensitive to his appearance and what other's thought of his face, he still craved attention and human connection as most did. While not outgoing, Dolarhyde proved to be less socially awkward than first assumed and Hannibal came to realize the Red Dragon became stronger with each order of Marcus' that he carried out. Dolarhyde's mind had fractured into one persona that wanted a normal life with Reba while the other called for her death to remove an obstruction in its murderous path. In another life it may have been useful to wind the Dragon up and watch it go, but they weren't in another life and the calmer Dolarhyde was the persona they needed to be dominant. So, Hannibal had put his outstanding medical skills to good use and had begun treating Dolarhyde as quickly though gently as possible. Medicating him had proven difficult, the Dragon had fought back at every opportunity with that one, but once Hannibal had started mixing his meds into the lunches he prepared for each of their appointments, Dolarhyde had become much more manageable.

Once Hannibal was certain he'd come to understand Dolarhyde well enough and could pull back on his leash if needed, Price had begun joining them to discuss the theatre Marcus' auctions operated out of and when would be best to strike. Price had worked out really rather quickly he'd be of little use beyond opening doors and distracting people, not when there were two serial killers about to be unleashed. Dolarhyde who'd eliminated the families of countless kidnapped omegas, and Hannibal who could do the most gruesome of things with such artistic flare.

They'd been discussing timelines and how much time between Marcus' people bringing the omegas in and the auction beginning was when Hannibal's office door opened admitting Will. It was unusual to see Will at Hannibal's office, he normally remained with the children at home or the House during the day, but he'd not be sent away.

"Will," Hannibal greeted, genuinely pleased to see his mate as he rose from his chair and crossed the room to kiss him. "Is everything all right, brangusis? Where are the twins?"

"They're with Abigail and Winston."

This was a new thing that had only been going on about a week. Abigail had been spending more time at their home with the twins and Will as a way to bring her out of her shell. A girl of fifteen shouldn't have spent all her days at the House, not now she could come and go as she pleased. Schooling had been something Hannibal had concerned himself with. Many of the remaining omegas had been denied a proper education so he and Alana had seen to getting text books and online courses; Abigail hadn't seemed keen though. It wasn't that she didn't wish to have an education or to better herself, more that she had no desire to associate with the world in any way. Having her spent time in their home where Will could walk Winston with her or take the twins for a stroll, was simply the first phase in their plan to acclimatize her.

"And you wanted to come check on Team Awesome." Price chuckled. "Pull up a seat, we could do with a fresh pair of eyes."

While he'd not have been connected with anything called Team Awesome, Hannibal had no complaints about his darling mate joining them. The slight glare Dolarhyde gave the omega wasn't lost on Hannibal either. 'Ah,' began his mind. 'This is jealousy. Francis feels a threat to my attention.' Had Dolarhyde still been unmedicated, something as simple as this minor jealousy could have turned into something bloody, but Dolarhyde was medicated and Hannibal knew which button to push.

"This is Francis Dolarhyde, the alpha I told you about." Hannibal gestured to the dark-haired man. "He's kindly agreed to help us. Francis, this is my mate Will Graham."

"Hi."

"Not that pretty." Dolarhyde muttered to himself, but everybody returned to their planning rather than questioning what that had meant.

With Dolarhyde's exemplary assistance and detailed descriptions, Hannibal soon had a perfect mental image of the Madison-May Theatre. It had operated as a theatre and ballroom named after the owner's wife until just after WWII when it had been damaged by a fire and subsequently sold. Its new owner had repaired the Madison-May back to its full glory where it had been in business until the late fifties when it had been shut down for a reason none of the men in Hannibal's office could quite figure out. Since then the building had sat alone and silent having been totally forgotten about – condemned according to Dolarhyde but nobody had bothered to knock it down. Now, the stairs squeaked unnervingly, the once ornate ceilings had taken over by mould and spiders, brickwork had so much graffiti it was hard to determine what color the walls had been to begin win. Décor wasn't of any real importance though, the network of hallways from backstage to the rest of the building was.

"I get there aren't security gates and all, but surely there are too many guards involved for two alphas to sweep through like Hannibal did before."

"Worry not, my love."

"Yeah, don't worry about it." Dolarhyde leaned forward in his seat. "A small fire, it'll work as a great distraction for the buyers. Let Hannibal slip into the back too. I'll send some of my boys to go deal with it. Jimmy'll take care of that, then me and Doctor Lecter can do what we do. You stay home."

Were they really going to fight over Hannibal? Will didn't see the need for a fight, Hannibal was already his mate and had no interest in the alpha. It might have been highly unusual, but alphas fucking wasn't exactly unheard of – treated as a sort of fetish more than anything else. Had Hannibal met Dolarhyde first, maybe he'd have been into it, but he hadn't met Dolarhyde first and Will had no intention of letting whatever this was continue. Dolarhyde could have a few scraps of Hannibal's attention here and there, but he wasn't allowed Hannibal's love. Before he'd realized he'd moved, Will had gone to sit in his mate's lap – something Hannibal allowed out of quiet amusement more than anything else – then carried on discussing the plan like nothing had happened.

~X~

Beverly wanted to cry but her tears had dried up weeks ago when she'd been sold like a hunk of meat. The alpha who'd finally purchased her was named Oliver and hadn't stopped pointing out how much he'd spent on Beverly since the moment she'd been taken to his home. The man was a talker, the sort who never shut up because they liked their own voice too much. He had a family, a beta wife and probably kids – all down to some business agreement his father had made according to Oliver. The aforementioned wife was the reason Beverly had found herself locked up in a shed on the very back of the property where she couldn't be heard or accidentally stumbled across. How

was it that her room back at the House had actually been more preferable? At least back there people had actually cared about her, Oliver couldn't have cared less as long as he still had warm holes to fill.

She'd spent almost every moment of her time as Oliver's captive chained to one wall of the shed by her throat with only a small pile of mystery sheets serving as her bed. She wanted to scream, wanted to cry, wanted to figure a way out of the hell she'd been forced into, but knew she couldn't just like she'd known it at the House. Price had spoken of a rescue, but no rescue had come.

The sound of Oliver fishing his keys out of his pocket was what alerted her to his return and no amount of wishing sent him away. Cold night air followed him into the small shed only to be cut off again the second the door closed. Smirk on his face and belt already open, this alpha had no love for anyone or anything that wasn't himself just like all the others she'd encountered. Beverly's mouth was too dry to scream, so she glared at him with all the hate she could; Oliver remained unfazed.

"Don't be like that, love." He teased. "I paid good money for you and I intend to make the most of my investment."

An investment, was that all her life was amounted to now? Had she really been reduced to a breathing sex toy? All her hopes and dreams for life dashed the second she'd presented as an omega.

The alpha yanked Beverly to him by her dark hair which desperately needed a comb, strands ripped from her head with a violent rage she'd not been prepared for. He giggled at her pain, as his belt came loose to wrap around her head as a makeshift gag.

"There, that's better isn't it. Being a good little bitch in heat for me."

With a shove she was back on the cold ground, though this time with a stinging pain in her head and buzzing in her ears. His large hand ran down Beverly's body to ripped leggings she'd been wearing since before she'd been auctioned off. They were a discoloured pale green with holes at the knees and smaller ones here and there. The leggings were a little too large as well, something Oliver made use of as it was easier to pull them down her cold thighs.

Beverly screamed – at least she tried to, the leather gag proved talented at its job. If someone could just hear her maybe she stood a chance of the nightmare ending. If his wife heard, surely she'd call the police. Or maybe she already did know and just ignored the whole thing to avoid her being the one to suffer Oliver's wrath.

When his hand found her core, Oliver forced two fingers inside her, his sharp nails more like claws as they scraped sensitive flesh. Brown eyes clamped shut as tears pricked the corners and more cries tried to escape her gagged mouth. Soon he had her pinned, knees pressed into the icy ground among her makeshift bed of sheets; more purple-green bruises would form soon enough. Fingers retracted but the momentary relief didn't last because Oliver thrust inside the omega so violently screamed deep into the gag. Her muffled yelps excited Oliver, had the alpha growling and snapping unimaginative obscenities at her while he chased after his own pleasure. Forceful thrusts violated Beverly with reckless abandon over and over encouraged by her tears which were soaked up gleefully. His teeth found her neck, savage bites just below her scent gland like a torment; Oliver had no intention of mating her but that didn't mean he'd not torture Beverly with the threat of it.

"Good little bitch." He chuckled. "Bet your tears taste fucking perfect!"

Those tears poured down her face, she'd thought them dried up yet they fell like rivers mixing with the magenta blood leaking from the corners of her mouth where the belt dug into flesh. She didn't want this. Didn't want to be a victim. Didn't want her life to be one long stretch of darkness and pain, there had to be some good along the way. 'Maybe my time with Will, Abigail, Brian and Jimmy was the good bit?' a melancholic voice at the back of her brain pondered. Beverley tried to fight, tried to claw and buck Oliver off of her but it hadn't ever worked with any other alphas so why should it have worked on him? Each failed attempt to escape him only made Oliver laugh more. In the end it was the laughing which hurt the most, not the pain of being repeatedly raped or the leather digging into her skin, it was the humiliating laughter from an alpha that haunted her; a constant reminder she'd become pathetic.

Oliver's climax fast approached, his thrusts grew erratic and large hands worked in tandem to both pin Beverly down and yank her hair to cause her back to arch backward unnaturally. It hurt – everything hurt and that damn laughing wouldn't stop. When he eventually spilled his disgusting seed inside her it was almost a relief. Finally it would end, if only for a little while; a brief intermission for rest.

"That's a good little omega. Got what you needed, hey? All full of cum, you things are always begging for that."

After tucking himself away and retrieving his belt, Oliver left locking the door behind him, chuckling the whole time. Beverly listened to it fade into nothingness just to confirm to herself he'd actually gone rather than hiding in some shadow to pounce on her again. She lay unmoving for a long time, each moment bleeding into another silent one as tears and blood dried on her face. She'd been someone once, someone loved and cared for. The eldest child with a love for the violin, she'd been witty and tried to treat those around her well, she'd had friends and ambitions. Many at the House had hated their status as an omega, thought it had ruined their lives, but Beverly hadn't once blamed the way she'd presented for her suffering. Being an omega wasn't the reason she'd been bought, sold and sexually abused, it was the fault of the alphas who cared only for money and themselves, they'd caused all this. Hopefully there were good alphas out there who treated their mates with respect and knew there was more to life than their own orgasm; if Beverly got really lucky, she might meet one some day.

# Chapter 6

Hannibal's suspicion that Marcus Delamare kept records of who bought his omegas had turned out to be true thanks to Dolarhyde. The man had subtly let himself into Marcus' office one night while he was absent to root through the drawers. He enjoyed that sense of praise Hannibal gave him when he'd done something useful, earning attention from a serial killer as prolific and infamous as the Chesapeake Ripper sated Dolarhyde in a way he'd not even known he craved. Then there was the Dragon – quieter than it used to be – who hadn't been sure what to make of Hannibal, it had respected the achievements of another serial killer, but otherwise hadn't concluded anything about the man. Perhaps the Great Red Dragon didn't matter anymore, it had become quieter since Hannibal had started him on meds and that was what Dolarhyde had wanted, right? For the Dragon to go away, to stop pressuring him to kill Reba. Why did things always have to be so confusing inside his head? Hannibal had told him he'd help though. This marvel of a man he idolized would raise him from perdition.

With the records on Beverly and Brian, the little alliance formed between murderers, former sex slaves and indebted betas had made headway with their plans. They'd pick off the lesser targets first, the ones around Marcus that were easy to remove from the board before they made a bee-line for the boss battle. Closest turned out to be Johannes Marsden and Brian. The man lived alone in a fairly isolated house with only a housekeeper that came in each morning.

Getting Brian back first would also sooth the constant panic and heartache in Price allowing him to concentrate properly for the first time since Mason and Cornell had shoved Brian into that truck. Both Hannibal and Dolarhyde could understand his feelings to some extent; Hannibal would have slaughtered everybody who thought they could take Will from him, while Dolarhyde had to see Reba most days sitting chained to a wall.

Unfortunately, Price's eagerness to get his intended mate back, had led to Hannibal putting his foot down as they stood in his home study late one afternoon.

"I understand you want to be there for Brian, I appreciate that, but you will slow us down."

His mouth fluttered desperate to argue but Dolarhyde began speaking before he could get anything out; the whole time Will cradled a sleeping Veronique and watched on.

"Doctor Lecter is right. The less people go in, the faster and more efficient we'll be. I handle the few guards outside, he deals with Marsden and gets your omega."

A simple plan but simple was often more effective. Hannibal had no doubt he could handle everything alone, but Dolarhyde was a crack shot and it would have been ridiculous not to make use of him. He was also fully aware that this partnership would increase Dolarhyde's loyalty to him; those meds and a little attention went a long way with the dark-haired alpha.

Will pressed a kiss to his daughter's forehead. "As much as I don't want to agree with Francis, he is right about this, Jimmy. Let them do it, they know what they're doing. Hannibal will bring Brian home, don't doubt him."

Will's faith in his mate wouldn't ever stop amazing Hannibal. Price might have quietly accepted the serial killer onto his team, Dolarhyde may have idolized him, but only Will would ever truly

understand and accept Hannibal for who he was. A divine treasure was Will Graham. Unable to stop himself, Hannibal made his way across the room to snake his arms around Will from behind, he kissed the top of his head then smiled down fondly to his sleeping daughter. They'd made such beautiful pups, hopefully they'd one day make some more.

"You see, Jimmy? Will is only thinking about what is best for everybody involved. There is no need to worry, I assure you of that. Francis and I will bring Brian back to you."

To be perfectly honest, both the serial killers would have been content to leave all the lost omegas to their fates, but Will craved the safety of his friends and Dolarhyde craved a closer partnership with his fellow alpha, so Hannibal would retrieve Brian and the others, then wipe Marcus Delamare out.

~X~

Stars shined bright in the sky as Hannibal and Dolarhyde approached the home of Johannes Marsden. A large modern construction with little to show for itself other than the amount of wealth wasted on its design. Hannibal wasn't exactly a stranger to that which lingered close to ostentatious, but Marsden's home could only be described as gaudy; it possessed no soul nor any real class. The two men had left Dolarhyde's truck just under a mile away then silently walked to the house; Dolarhyde armed with a gun while Hannibal had the trusty blades he preferred.

The hour was late, Will likely would have been tucked up in bed with a book by now while the twins slumbered in their cribs and Abigail in the guest room. A normal night for just about everybody.

While Dolarhyde worked his way around the house quietly gunning down the handful of guards and sating what could still emerge of the Dragon, Hannibal disabled the alarm and made his way inside. To say Marsden was rich and had clearly put some thought into home security, he seemed to have done it rather cheaply. Seemed they needed to add excessively frugal to Marsden's list of negative traits. Shutting off that alarm had been practically comical and a handful of guards probably hadn't been even remotely challenging for a man like Dolarhyde.

Somehow the inside of Marsden's home was worse than the exterior. Minimalism seemed to be the primary theme. Minimalism should have been about neutral colors and prioritizing the essential, removing excess to achieve a delicate elegance. Instead, all the décor had succeeded in doing was making the place look like Marsden hadn't finished moving in.

The scent of fearful omega assaulted him the moment he stepped inside, an alarming aroma which could have only been Brian. No omega should have been forced to smell so foul in Hannibal's mind, beautiful creatures shouldn't have festered in terror. Slow steps guided Hannibal through the house, upstairs and along a hall into what must have been the master bedroom. There he found Marsden fast asleep in bed, naked with silk sheets pulled up just enough to provide some modesty; the alpha was practically inviting what would come next. Quietly, Hannibal set down his cooler on the dresser then readied his tools. Dolarhyde might have gotten the pleasure of more kills but Hannibal hadn't ever been one to value quantity over quality, his kill might would be art while Dolarhyde's would be a ventilation unit in people's heads. Dolarhyde had skill and a flare for the

dramatic, Hannibal would easily concede that, but nobody would ever match up to his artistic prowess.

With scalpel in hand and the knowledge his omega waited at home for him, Hannibal buried the blade into Marsden's throat where he swiftly severed the vocal cords silencing the yelp that tried to escape his mouth. Hands shot to the wound as he flailed about in a desperate attempt to repel his attacker, but Hannibal had been prepared for this and caught Marsden's right fut only to sever through the Achilles tendon there before doing the same with the other to prevent running or any real fight. A larger knife soon had the infraspinatus muscles of both shoulders irrevocably damaged; Marsden couldn't have fought no matter how hard he tried. With hardly any real effort Hannibal had taken the other alpha's voice and ability to flee. His eyes filled with horror as Hannibal readied himself for the task at hand, alpha fear soon pushed that of Brian from the bedroom along with the tantalizing scent of crimson blood. It soaked into the sheets, dripped down onto the floor in sticky beads, steadily decorated a house which craved something beyond bland.

"No, don't try to move," said Hannibal calmly. "There is no point. You can think and feel, but I have removed your ability to speak or escape for the time being. All you'll do is hurt yourself further and drag things out."

Hannibal's micro smile as he pulled the sheets off the other alpha might have been more terrifying than the pain and blade. Sure enough he could wriggle, probably crawl given half a chance, but this alpha would have cut him to shreds long before he managed it. Hannibal gazed at the canvas which was this naked man's shivering flesh. What would Hannibal paint? What masterpiece would his scalpel's brush strokes create? Oh, he knew exactly, he also knew Oliver Cornwallis would be the other half of the painting.

"I'm sure you're wondering what has delivered you to this fate, I'll tell you." Hannibal was considerate like that. "Actions have consequences, Mister Marsden, consequences we must all pay for in the end. Best to face them with pride and a head held high rather than cowering away from them. The omega you purchased from Marcus Delamare, he means very little to me, but he means a great deal to the one I love. He wants you to suffer and pay for your crimes in a way only I am capable of carrying out. You and your kin are a scourge on this world, you will be cut out and removed like a cancer." He leaned in close to Marsden's face then as the man tried to wriggle enough to get off the bed. "You have raped and abused omegas for the majority of your life. It shan't be tolerated any longer." With that Hannibal shot back to his full height and clapped his gloved hands together a single time before carefully beginning to remove his face. "Nobody will ever have to look upon your visage again."

Marsden screamed as Hannibal worked, a dull, hardly audible sound Hannibal could have tuned out if he'd wanted to. The bloody alpha twitched in agony, adrenaline numbing the pain just enough to keep him awake and perpetuate his suffering. Hannibal may as well have been an avenging angel in that moment. One thing which wouldn't ever stop amazing the serial killer was just how smoothly the human face came away from muscle and bone when one knew how; almost like skinning a rabbit, just a few incisions and then a sharp pull to get it off. With Marsden's face removed and placed neatly inside his cooler, Hannibal return his attention to the rest of Marsden's naked body. Softly the scalpel was drawn from the bottom of Marsden's ribs to the base of his abdomen.

"The kidneys next, yes?"

He'd not expected a response, by this point pain had driven Marsden delirious, so he simply got to work as Dolarhyde appeared to lean in the doorway having finished killing. Curiosity had drawn

him up to the bedroom, drawn him to see the blood and Chesapeake Ripper in action. While it might have been unclear what Dolarhyde had expected, the reality was … more. Just more. More dramatic, more mesmerising, more visceral. Hannibal Lecter a god before him.

"Why did you cut his face off?" Dolarhyde finally questioned.

"A man as lowly as this does not deserve an identity." The first kidney found its way to the cooler. "Furthermore, it has been some time since I recreated a painting, but I see an opportunity Misters Marsden and Cornwallis."

Dolarhyde's head cocked to one side and his eyes squinted momentarily. "You're going to let the police know their deaths are related?"

"But of course. Most law enforcement will never know exactly why they're connected, but those in Marcus' circle will understand the meaning. Frankly, the FBI will be more concerned with seeing such indications that the Chesapeake Ripper and Tooth Fairy have partnered." Out the corner of his eye Hannibal saw Dolarhyde tense at those words. "They like to sling demeaning nicknames, don't they? Worry not, Francis, those of any real importance know your true name, know you are magnificent."

The dark-haired alpha almost beamed but managed to contain himself at the last moment. Blood continued to pour from Marsden's useless body as Hannibal hollowed him out and, just for a few seconds, Dolarhyde wished the moment wouldn't ever end.

Kidneys, liver, lungs and eventually the heart, Hannibal removed just about everything from his victim with some of Will's favorite recipes in mind; Foie de Veau en Persillade avec Pommes de Terre would surely be first. Another deep cut was made to Marsden's right thigh where Hannibal carefully cut back the layers exposing white bone beneath. Then, lastly, Hannibal castrated the alpha. A shell now, that was all Marsden was. With everything inside the cooler, Hannibal replaced his gloves with clean ones then took up the rope he'd brought with them.

"What are you painting, Doctor Lecter?"

There was almost a childish curiosity to Dolarhyde that Hannibal admired. He bound Marsden's feet and ankles with one end of the rope then turned to face his fellow alpha and murderer.

"It's a recreation of *The Corpses of the De Witt Brothers*, have you heard of it?" Dolarhyde shook his head indicating he hadn't. Despite his attachment to a certain painting, he'd never really known all that much about art and didn't think himself that artistic; he'd never be like Hannibal. "It was painted around 1672 by Jan de Baen. A captivating piece depicting the mutilated bodies of Johan and Cornelis de Witt, they hang upside down with their bodies cut open. The original hangs in the Rijksmuseum, so why don't I make us our own?" With a smile and nod he turned back to his work. "I think that lovely staircase would be a good place to display him."

"Want help carrying him?"

"That would be most appreciated. Thank you, Francis."

With an extra set of hands it was fairly simple to get Marsden into place and the rope tied tightly to keep him there, arms dangling down onto the floor, skinless face pointed toward the front door and a glossy pool of red around his head. Outside littering the grounds lay the work of the Tooth Fairy

while the inside was one of the Chesapeake Ripper's artistic creations that demanded to be looked at.

House silent and bloody, the serial killers moved on to their second objective of finding Brian. Hannibal could smell him, the stench of scared omega had infested every inch of the house, so the two alphas simply followed Hannibal's nose into the basement to find … nothing. A small laundry room and some gym equipment, that was all the basement held. That extraordinary nose of his being wrong was something Hannibal couldn't accept, that nose had sniffed out cancer before! Dolarhyde glanced into the laundry room in search of a secret door or crawl space while Hannibal peered around at the gym equipment. His nose was never wrong, so if it said Brian was down there then he sure as hell was down there. Maroon eyes spotted it then, a suspiciously neat stack of storage crates in one corner near the treadmill, they didn't belong. Hannibal removed them quickly revealing the small square outline of a hatch on the floor with a padlock.

"Let me pick that, I'm faster."

While the jury would likely reman out indefinitely on which of them could pick a lock faster, Hannibal didn't object to Dolarhyde kneeling down beside him to open the padlock. Frankly, getting it open was the main thing. Dolarhyde pulled the hatch open letting light spill into the small space below and reveal the full extent of Marsden's cruelty. Brian had been squished into the tiny square space like a child would shove a doll into a drawer. His knees had been pressed into his chest and his arms awkwardly pinned behind his back. Light hurt his dark eyes, made them water and sting, but he saw enough to realize neither of the alphas over him were his new owner. Had Marsden taken a leaf out of Jack's book and decided to start prostituting him for cash or his own amusement?

"You are all right now, Brian." Hannibal assured as he and Dolarhyde carefully prised him out of the hole. "Jimmy Price asked us to come get you. We're taking you home to him."

Rescue? Was that a real thing? Part of him, the distrustful part, wanted to rebuff the alphas and avoid falling for the cruel trick, to wait for Marsden to show himself and laugh at the omega's pain. However, Marcus nor Marsden had ever known about his feelings for the beta and Price had been talking about some kind of rescue before he and Beverly had been taken away. Just this once, just one more time Brian would have a little hope. That hope had him take Hannibal's proffered hand.

# Chapter 7

Energy bubbled inside him like a shaken soda bottle, he couldn't sit still, couldn't even think straight really, so Price paced back and forth at the House's reception desk. Miriam had been trying to calm the nervous man for a good fifteen minutes, ever since Hannibal had called to say he was on his way in with Brian. Alana had been kind enough to see to it that Brian's room was properly habitable; clean sheets on his new bed, a couple of books on the nightstand for if he wanted something to do, and a little care cart of bottled water and easily eaten snacks. Barney had made a large pot of soup for everybody to have at lunch, so setting a little aside for Brian's arrival hadn't been an issue. Meanwhile, Will had fetched his alpha's medical kit from his office just in case there was need of it.

"They should have been back by now. What if something happened? What if Hannibal-"

Abigail cut him off. "When have you ever known Hannibal to fail at anything? If he says he'll do something, then he'll do it."

Will couldn't have put it better himself. Over the last few months, with Abigail spending more time at their home and interacting with the twins, she'd begun to develop a closeness to Hannibal similar to the one she shared with Will. At first Will hadn't quite known what to make of it, a primal part of him hadn't wanted any other omegas getting close to his mate, but this was Abigail and Hannibal had started to look on her like a daughter.

Everybody might have been on edge for Brian's homecoming, but Will was frankly more concerned with Dolarhyde. While he doubted Hannibal would bring him along, if he did for some reason then every omega at the House would mentally go to DEFCON 1 and that would surely shatter the majority of their personal progress. Will looked down to Claude snoozing in his arms, such a beautiful tiny copy of his alpha father, then to Veronique who Abigail held. No, Hannibal wouldn't have risked bringing Dolarhyde to the House, not yet at least.

"Why don't you sit down?" Alana suggested when Price's constant movements started to drive her insane.

Reluctantly he obeyed and dropped into one of the two chairs behind the reception desk only to fill his hands with his head. All that planning and secrecy had finally paid off, they'd found Brian and he'd come home, that was a good thing! Yet Price couldn't shake his fears. What had Johannes Marsden done to his sweet Brian? Would the man forever be altered? What if Brian hated him for not being able to save him the night he'd been taken? Price hadn't even been able to save Brian himself, he'd had to leave it up to Hannibal and Dolarhyde; two murderers. 'Please bring him home safe, Hannibal.' Price pleaded quietly inside his mind. Without Brian there wouldn't be any point to living.

Suddenly Claude shifted in Will's arms, woke with sleepy blinks that had Alana and Will smiling down at him in seconds.

"You're getting impatient, aren't you?" Will asked his eldest. "You want Papa to come back. Don't worry, he'll be here soon and you can have all the fuss you want."

"I can't see Hannibal fussing, doesn't seem like him."

All save for Miriam breathed out a small laugh at Alana's comment. Hannibal might not have seemed like the sort to fuss over or coddle his children, didn't seem like the sort to play on the floor with them either, but Hannibal did do all of those things. He was a loving father who adored the twins and wouldn't ever let harm come to them. Maybe, when the twins were a little older and Will was ready, they'd have another one.

"You're getting so big." Will mused to himself. "You'll be running around before long."

"Kids do that, they grow." Said Alana offhandedly. "If you want those tiny fingers and toes so badly, you can always have another pup."

Will's brow furrowed deeply as Price went right back to his worrying. "I'm not going to have another pup just for tiny fingers and toes."

Abigail came closer to look at little Claude. "Didn't say you didn't want one though."

A small kiss found its way to Claude's soft forehead causing him to smile up at his father then begin to babble in that bizarre mix of American and Lithuanian accents they'd become known for. Hannibal spoke a handful of languages while Will only hid his native tongue; the twins though, Hannibal wouldn't accept them speaking anything less than both English and Lithuanian fluently.

All thoughts of innocent conversation and contemplation about a third pup faded to nothingness then as the buzzer sounded and Miriam quickly hit the door release admitting Hannibal. He half carried Brian at his side and kicked the door shut behind him with a foot, there was also a cooler under his other arm but only Will took any proper notice of that.

"Brian!"

Price charged across the small room to his intended mate to find black eyes, scabs and bruises coating his skin. Will handed Claude to Alana so he could quietly move the cooler out of sight where nobody would be tempted to ask questions about it, then rushed to his alpha. While even Price didn't know of Hannibal's status as the Chesapeake Ripper, Will was fairly certain finding a cooler full of human organs would have given the game away. Abigail might have been onto him though, that girl was smarter than people gave her credit for.

"Jimmy?" Brian whispered as Price took him into his arms.

"Yes! Yeah, it's me. You're okay now. You're safe. Let's get you upstairs, yeah? You can rest and then I'll explain everything."

With Miriam's help Price escorted Brian up to his room while Alana followed after handing Claude back to Will. Hannibal watched them go for a moment before he turned his attention to his pups and mate.

"Is everything all right, Will?" Hannibal asked with a kiss. "The pups are well, I trust?"

"We're all good. I was just worried you'd bring Dolarhyde with you."

Abigail's brow tweaked questioningly at the mention of a new name but she held her tongue, instead she chose to listen quietly while bouncing Veronique lightly.

"While I believe I can control him, I shan't invite him here unless the situation calls for it." He petted Claude's soft locks then changed the subject. "Please fetch my med-"

"Your medical case? I already did, it's at the foot of the bed in Brian's room for you. I didn't know what condition he'd be in. Thought having it there would save time."

Hannibal nodded clearly pleased. "Thank you, mylimasis. I applaud your quick thinking."

With that Hannibal hurried up the concrete stairs and into Brian's room. It had been overhauled since Brian had last been there. Where before had been a soulless box, now was an actual bedroom. A proper bed, nightstand with lamp, even a cosy armchair for Price to watch over him from. Paint had mostly found its way to the communal areas as part of Alana's insistence, but Price had used some of the leftover navy to give the bedroom a feature wall. While it paled in comparison to Hannibal's idea of decorating even on his laziest day, at least some effort had gone into the bedroom; it couldn't be deemed a cell any longer.

Leaving Abigail in charge of the twins, Will followed his alpha into Brian's room just in time to see Hannibal shed his overcoat, suit jacket and begin to roll up his sleeves. He must have been tired but all those years working at the ER had made pulling all-nighters a somewhat simple task for Hannibal. Without much fuss Hannibal performed his exam of Brian, cleaned his wounds and determined he had two fractured ribs which Miriam was sent to get ice for.

"Right." Hannibal said after he packed the medical kit up and stood. "There is no cause for alarm other than your ribs. Ice them for twenty minutes at a time over the next few days and avoid putting pressure on the injury – no heavy lifting, no bending. Stay in bed for a few days and I'll come to check on you then." He turned to Alana and Will who'd loitered in the doorway. "I think that we should leave Brian to rest, everyone out please. Jimmy, help him ice his ribs and call me if needed."

Price nodded emphatically then dropped beside Brian's bed to hold his hand.

"Of course, Hannibal. Thank you for bringing him back. Thank D as well."

With a pause for agreement, Hannibal and the others vacated the room and made their way down the stairs just as Miriam returned with the ice. She was told to get Brian something to eat once he'd finished icing, an order she obeyed just as easily as she obeyed all of Hannibal's orders.

Brian's rescue was only half the job, he had a canvas half painted and couldn't leave something unfinished. After some sleep and a few days to discuss it with Dolarhyde, they'd go retrieve Beverly so Hannibal could finish his painting.

~X~

Shortly after leaving Brian to sleep, Will and Hannibal had headed up to his office with the twins in their car seats since Hannibal would want to leave sooner rather than later. Organs needed to be refrigerated and Hannibal rather liked the sound of some sleep. He returned his medical kit to its place on a shelf behind his desk while Will set both car seats down and assured the twins they'd be home with their toys in no time.

"Thank you for bringing Brian back."

"Of course, Will, you wanted to save your friends and I am the tool with which you do it." He snared Will in his arms and kissed his temple. "I love you."

"I love you, too. The cooler though, it's heavy. You took loads of him, didn't you?"

Hannibal nodded simply, never bothered trying to hide his nature when it came to Will. "Far more than usual but my stocks were running low. I'd planned to make your favorite for dinner."

Before Will could get a response out, Abigail's voice sounded from the doorway. "Do you use all of them?"

Her dark eyes had fixed on Hannibal, clearly hyper aware of him but not afraid. He'd wanted to point out eavesdropping was rude and admonisher for it, but deflecting didn't seem like the correct response in that moment. Abigail saw things others couldn't or wouldn't, she'd seen Hannibal's darkness just as Will had, not as strongly maybe, but she'd seen it.

"Excuse me?"

"Do you use all of them? Make use of them? If you don't it's just cheap murder."

Despite never having been accused of cheap murder before, Hannibal felt his fondness for Abigail grow in that moment to new heights. Will had always held a sense of parental responsibility toward her due to her young age and it seemed that emotion had spread to Hannibal himself. He knew Abigail to be special, the lack of fear in her eyes just confirmed it.

"Yes." He did her the kindness of answering honestly. "I often remove the majority of the organs and a few choice cuts of meat."

"What do you do with the rest?"

Such a delightfully curious teenager. "Johannes Marsden, the one who purchased Brian, I left him as a message."

"And the others?" Abigail waked into the room's centre while Will kept flicking his blue eyes between his mate and girl he cared so deeply for. "They can't all be messages."

"Tell you what, I'll make you a deal." Hannibal extracted himself from Will and moved closer to Abigail. He could have killed her so easily, but how could he hurt someone as unique as her? He wasn't the sort to negotiate if he didn't have to, but the growing feelings he and Will had for her had left him more accommodating than usual. She deserved respect and love. "Everyone I kill, I always take something from. I've been taking more since I started feeding those here at the House. However, I've thought about bone knives before. I'll make you your own set if you'd like."

Abigail seemed taken aback that Hannibal would go to all that trouble just for her, but was truly grateful for it. She'd always hated wastefulness – humans were so wasteful.

"Okay," she nodded slowly. "Deal."

"Why," Hannibal found himself asking, the word so softly spoken as though he feared he might suddenly spook the girl before him. Both he and Will could plainly see the tortured soul inside her and longed to repair it. "You make it sound like you don't want me to be like somebody else."

Eyes downcast; Abigail revealed part of her past she'd never told anyone else. "Everybody thinks I was stolen from my home like Brian or Beverly, but I wasn't. I presented early, really early, and it did something to my dad. His name was Garrett Jacob Hobbs."

"The Minnesota Shrike."

Hannibal had read about the Shrike of course, he'd been rather curious about it at the time. Cannibalistic serial killers weren't all that common and him returning that Nichols girl had said rather a lot about his state of mind. If Abigail was his daughter then suddenly so much of her personality made sense.

"You've heard of him?" Hannibal nodded. "He em, he had this thing about hunting. My mom never knew what he was doing but I saw him, I knew. I think he wanted me to help. After he and my mom died I was sent to a foster family but they didn't like me. They acted like I'd encouraged him one and day Mason showed up to take me away."

The way Abigail had always just accepted her fate became clear then, her whole life she'd been mistreated in one form or another, at least at the House she'd had a sense of routine. None of that mattered though, the people who'd hurt her couldn't get at her again and Abigail knew she had like-minded people close by.

"That can never happen again, Abigail." Will assured from behind his mate.

Brown eyes found Hannibal's maroon ones. "How many people have you killed?"

"Many more than your father."

Without hesitation and in the most determined tone either of them had ever heard from Abigail, she replied: "You're my father now."

Was he? Having fatherly feelings towards a girl didn't make a man her father. Yet, when Will squeezed his hand, Hannibal saw no reason to object. Abigail had been helping Will care for the twins for some time now, she'd come out of her shell with them and had unconsciously filled the role of big sister. He knew full well blood did not make family, that was simply an outdated concept normally used to guilt people into doing things they didn't wish to. This girl needed family, Will and Hannibal were in the perfect position to be that for her. She was as a sister to Claude and Valentina so she would be a daughter to them.

He squeezed Will's hand back. "We both are."

Hannibal smiled, a real smile that very few people ever got to see. He'd not intended for any of this when he'd arrived with Brian, but Hannibal found he had no objections.

# Chapter 8

After Miriam had brought up some soup and a glass of water, Brian had fallen into an exhausted sleep with Price not far behind him. Barney had stuck his head in every half hour or so just to check on them, but otherwise they'd been left to rest just as Hannibal had insisted. It wasn't until nearly noon the next day that Brian had woken from his deep sleep and, when he did, it was to a room both recognizable and totally alien.

"Jimmy?"

The silver-haired beta lit up seeing his intended mate finally wake. He leaned forward in his armchair to capture Brian's hand in his.

"I'm right here. Everything is okay, Brian. How do you feel?"

The omega hissed a little as he shifted but at least the swelling had gone down around his eyes.

"My head hurts, but not as bad. Where are we? Is this my room?"

Price nodded. "Yeah. The alpha who came to get you, the doctor, his name is Hannibal Lecter. Hannibal is the one I told you would put a stop to Jack and the House. Cordell took you away early, but he did everything he'd promised. Jack's dead, Brian, so is Mason and most of the guards. The omegas are free, there aren't any alphas other than Hannibal. Will's back as well. He's alive and safe, Hannibal is his mate."

That was a lot to mentally digest. Brian tried to sort through it all and get everything straight while Price poured him a glass of water then urged him to drink.

"Will's here? Jack's really dead?"

"Yes, they're gone. Will's safe and here. You don't have to worry. I love you, Brian."

Slowly the water was sipped as Brian replayed things in his mind. When that hatch had opened revealing the two alphas he'd not known what to think. The younger one had carried an almost animalistic aura while the older one, this Doctor Lecter, had struck him as a demon wearing a person suit. Neither had harmed him though, they'd promised to take him away from Marsden and reunite him with the man he loved; they'd done just that. Price seemed to trust those alphas, so Brian would as well for a little while.

~X~

Since having the twins, taking over the House and steadily working to reclaim the kidnapped omegas, Hannibal and Will had enjoyed precious little time to themselves. While they shared an evening meal most nights, they'd not really gone out to do anything and Hannibal's social calendar had started to beg attention. Intending to rectify all that with the aid of Abigail to babysit her little siblings, Hannibal had acquired tickets to *Carmen* and purchased Will a new suit for the occasion.

"Come along now, brangusis." Hannibal entered the bedroom having finished preparing dinner for Abigail – something she'd assured him wasn't necessary but nobody argued with Hannibal Lecter for long. "If we don't leave soon we will be late, which would be rude."

It wasn't exactly a secret that the opera wasn't really Will's sort of thing, but Hannibal had gone to the trouble of getting tickets and the people who thought they were his friends looked forward to seeing him. Blue eyes flicked to his mate – 'I don't mind the opera if you dress like this'.

"I'm sorry. It's just – Look, I've got no idea how to get a bow tie to go bow-y."

A smirk tugged the corner of Hannibal's mouth up as he went to provide assistance. Formal dress had become second nature to him over the years, he knew all the correct terminology, knew why an item was appropriate for certain settings but not others. Will knew nothing of that, was happy enough dressed in jeans and plaid shirts – t-shirts on his lazier days. How two people could be so fundamentally different yet the same at their cores was something of a mystery, but Hannibal would enjoy finding out.

Hannibal took the bow tie and set it aside neatly atop a dresser, then popped Will's collar button open. Will hardly even noticed, he was too lost in how handsome Hannibal looked in black tie. Part of him wanted to rip it all off his mate and be that needy omega society had long assumed his kin to be, but Hannibal had so been looking forward to opening night. With the bow tie situation rectified, Will turned away from the mirror to kiss his mate softly as thanks.

"I love you, Will."

Hannibal's deep voice permeated down to Will's very soul, swirled around inside him like wisps of smoke on a night with no breeze. Love wasn't something Will had been fortunate enough to have in the vast majority of his life, but love him Hannibal did. A doctor, a pantomath, a narcissistic psychopath, cannibal and serial killer, and Will wouldn't have changed him for the world. If he'd been younger and still naïve to how necessary the darkness was in civilisation, he might have thought differently, Will wasn't younger or more naïve though and he sure as hell wouldn't risk his mate for something as trivial as upholding the law. Police and politicians, so-called heroes and men of the church had been traipsing in and out of the House for years, they wouldn't uphold their own laws so why should he or Hannibal?

"I love you, too."

Out from Hannibal's inner pocket came a fairly thin box of green velvet which he proffered to the omega. "You shan't be needing a bow tie, Will. I got you a present."

Will wasn't unaccustomed to receiving presents from his mate. Hannibal took great pride with showering him in love any way he could; be it simple things like fishing equipment, new treats for Winston, or more refined items such as books. Jewelry, that hadn't been amongst them before, Will didn't really think himself the sort for jewelry and nor was Hannibal really. Marriage was an invention of betas, a way for them to share a bond in some way since they couldn't mate. Alphas and omegas hadn't put much stock in it until the turn of the century when the legal benefits of marriage had come to the foreground. This box though, it was too large for an engagement ring and Hannibal hadn't gotten on one knee, so Will really had no clue what the green box contained.

With a stiff click it opened revealing an omega collar, silver with two delicate rows of square diamonds which would have rested against his mating bite perfectly. Hannibal simply watched on at his mate's amazement with a quiet contentment. Omega collars weren't a common sight these

days, not totally phased out but no longer worn to anything other than formal events. Will had only seen them in old TV shows when he was a kid; he'd honestly never thought to have one of his own. Diamonds glinted in the bedroom light while Will continued to gaze at it. Simple yet elegant was probably the most apt description or simply beautiful.

Hannibal carefully lifted the omega collar out of the box as he spoke. "I never want you to feel owned, Will, I am not Jack Crawford. I am also aware omega collars aren't quite as common as they once were, but tonight is a formal event and you'll look so handsome. Will you accept it?"

Will didn't even need to think about it, just nodded with a smile. "Of course I will. It's lovely, Hannibal. Thank you."

Happily Hannibal fastened the collar around Will's neck. As imagined the collar sat snugly against Will's mating bite and twinkled out from his shirt in such a way that, while not obvious, was unmistakable.

Will hadn't ever worn such a thing but couldn't deny the odd sense of gratification it gave him. Hannibal loved him and now he had a shiny reminder of it.

~X~

Shortly after bidding their children a good evening, the mated pair had made their way to the opera where they'd headed up to the private box. Hannibal had hosted exactly two dinner parties since he'd taken Will in, much to everybody's dismay, and Will had managed to entirely avoid the second one due to his pregnancy, so he hadn't really associated with his mate's soi-disant friends. That had flooded him with nerves, he'd managed to distract himself on the drive over by staring out the window but, in that private box, there wasn't any escaping them. Social gatherings were *not* Will's happy place and he didn't have the luxury of being an ambivert like Hannibal.

Will stuck close to his alpha as they made their way around the small group in the box for greetings and niceties. He knew the short woman with the black bob was Missus Komeda – a novelist if Will remembered correctly – and he assumed the man beside her was the husband, other than that he couldn't remember any of their names nor did he care to. Hannibal's friends did more than enough talking for Will though, so only answering direct questions would work just fine for him.

"Hannibal darling!" Missus Komeda lit up the moment her eyes fell on Hannibal. "Where have you been? It's not like you to fall off the face of the earth."

"Apologies, I've had rather a lot of work lately."

She smiled brightly, lipstick the color of raspberries both eye-catching and bold against her pale skin. "Shouldn't work yourself so hard, Hannibal. We don't want Will thinking you're ignoring him."

A preposterous idea. "He'd never ignore me or our pups."

"Oh I don't doubt it, Will darling." The beta waved him off. "Pay no mind to me. Anyway, how are those twins of yours? Happy, I hope."

"They're fine. They're with their sister."

That comment had Missus Komeda raise an eyebrow and quickly look to Hannibal for an explanation. Hannibal hadn't expected to need to announce anything, but Will had given him a cause.

"William and I have taken in a teenage omega we met through our work with Omega Lives. She has no other family and we've become rather protective of her. Abigail is her name."

Mister Komeda finally perked up then; seemed to let his wife do the vast majority of his talking for him. "You're really taking to parenthood, Hannibal. Lone wolf to pack alpha."

A pack? Yes, Will liked that. They were a pack not just bonded by blood but their understanding an acceptance of one another. With Hannibal as their pack alpha nothing would ever go wrong or hurt them again.

Conversation continued with the beta couple for a short while but Will thankfully didn't need to do much talking during it. While the rest of Hannibal's friends had struck him as snobbish – a trait Hannibal sometimes shared – Missus Komeda was different. Instead of fishing for gossip or finding ways to point out Hannibal could have done better, she seemed genuinely interested in her friends' lives and seemed to realize when Will had reached his social limit; something Hannibal had seen in the woman as well.

Demand for another of Hannibal's extravagant dinner parties was higher than expected, something the narcissistic in Hannibal had soaked up, so it looked like the Chesapeake Ripper would become much more active in the next month. Missus Komeda had likened the dinner parties to unicorns at one point; said they'd become all too elusive over the last few years before her thoughts had returned to the twins. Talking about his pups was one of the few things which could get Will speaking freely after all.

Soon after the performance began and Will was forced to sit through several hours of French opera he couldn't really have cared less about. All the time that omega collar cuddled around his throat to never let him forget just how much Hannibal adored him.

At the intermission was when the mood changed for the mates. Another of Hannibal's rich friends named Mister Mendel had introduced them to an entrepreneur by the name of Oliver Cornwallis. Cornwallis was a name they were all too familiar with; Dolarhyde had been the first to bring it to their attention. This was the alpha who had Beverly, the alpha Hannibal had already decided would die.

"A beautiful omega collar," Oliver told Will – not a greeting or a 'how do you like the performance?', just straight for the collar like it was little more than a mark of ownership.

"Thank you." Will managed to keep his voice level but clung tight to Hannibal. "My mate has exquisite taste."

It wasn't fear which had Will cling to Hannibal quite so tightly, but rather anger. He wanted to launch at Oliver and claw his eyes out himself for what he'd been doing to Beverly, wanted to see Hannibal gut him alive. Hannibal, however, he'd gotten significantly better control over himself and kept his conversation polite. Even Abigail couldn't see through Hannibal's mask properly, just Will.

Sitting through the second half had been one of the hardest things Will ever had to do, even with all he'd suffered at the House. Hannibal had soothed him, had scented him when they'd taken a private trip to the facilities, yet nothing could calm Will's urge for Oliver's death.

"You were planning on killing him this week anyway." Will reasoned quietly as the performance continued. "Why not just do it tonight?" Hannibal had intended to reason with Will, to explain rushing into things was usually what got people arrested, but then Will had fixed him with those stunning cerulean eyes of his. "Please, alpha? I want him dead."

Having Will accept and avoid impeding his killings was one thing, but for his omega to plead for a death was quite another. Hannibal swallowed causing his Adam's apple to bob. This was the true darkness inside Will, the thing which made him perfect in every way – except for maybe his love for cheep pizza and burgers. He almost bent Will over right there, audience be dammed.

"All right," nodded the older man. "Once the opera has finished I shall take you home -"

"I want to come with you. I want to watch."

No, perfect didn't do Will justice, he needed to invent a better word. "Then *we* will collect my things from the house and make our way over to his home. I shall contact Francis on our way, he has been looking forward to eliminating the family."

It wouldn't be the first time Hannibal had been forced to accelerate his plans, and he was no stranger to improvising despite how much he liked to have everything planned all neat and tidy.

# Chapter 9

Contacting Dolarhyde as they left the opera had taken all of three minutes and, frankly, he'd seemed borderline ecstatic to move things up. With an agreement to meet them at Cornwallis' house, they'd returned to their own home, filled Abigail in on everything and checked on the twins before Hannibal had gathered what was needed. Nobody had bothered to change, Hannibal would just slip on one of his plastic suits once they arrived and Will couldn't help thinking his elegant murder had reached new heights.

Though a longer drive than to the opera house, Will hardly noticed it; he was adrenalized and eager to get his friend back. Once Beverly was home Will's promise to rescue them from Jack would be complete, he'd have kept his word. He wanted to introduce Beverly to his pups, wanted them to know the woman he hoped would be their godmother. Maybe after they got Beverly back he would stop having nightmares.

Oliver's home was an older house more in keeping with Hannibal's own with a vast quantity of land around it. The Bentley was left quite some distance away where it wouldn't be noticed and the mates silently made their way toward Oliver's home. This was nothing new for Hannibal, but Will hadn't ever experienced such a thing; he wanted Oliver dead and Beverly saved, but it was only when a shadow fell into line beside them that he realized they'd be killing people that night. Hannibal and Dolarhyde shared a greeting while Will meandered around in his thoughts; he'd killed Margot Verger, he was already a killer, but that had been a fit of anger while this was cold and calculated. No, Oliver Cornwallis didn't deserve second chances or pauses to think of morality, for what he'd done his sentence was death.

"I'm still killing the family, right?" Questioned Dolarhyde as he took the safety off his gun and raised it toward the first of the cameras they'd scouted out days ago. "I won't be denied."

"Nobody is denying you, Francis, I assure you of that. Will accompanying us was unforeseeable though, so I suggest you go ahead and kill anyone you like. As long as you leave Cornwallis for us and do not harm Beverly Katz should you come across her, I'll not interrupt."

That seemed to sooth any worries and concerns over. For a moment Dolarhyde had half expected Hannibal to insist Will got to slaughter kills meant for him. The Chesapeake Ripper could have done so much better than an uncultured runt for an omega – should have done better – but he couldn't help envying the way Hannibal looked at Will; Dolarhyde wanted someone to look at him like that. Reba might not have been able to actually make eye contact with him, but he'd seen the beginnings of love twinkle in them, maybe one day she'd love him properly.

"I've not got a problem with leaving him for you, Doctor Lecter. I want to see your painting finished."

With that Dolarhyde shot the camera and quickly moved on to the others in a systematic manner while the mates watched on. Wasn't this how things should have been? The former soldier carrying out the infiltration while the medic waited for his moment?

Will squeezed Hannibal's hand. "He still doesn't like me."

"That is because Francis is jealous of you, Will. He envies the love I have for you, my devotion, because he's never had that in his life before. Meeting me is the first time he feels truly seen by anybody and now he is greedy because he never wants to be without that feeling again."

One eyebrow raised above Will's glasses. "He's not going to do anything though, is he?"

"Not unless I tell him to, no. Francis would much rather have things remain the way they are than see me hate him."

"I get it." Will nodded. "I felt the same when I met you. Until you I'd just been another omega."

Hannibal cupped his cheek then and pulled him close for a kiss as shots began inside the house; just a faint pop and intermittent flashes through the windows. There would always be a bloody backdrop to their love and that somehow seemed appropriate.

"I love you, mylimasis. I will always love you and not just because you're the most beautiful omega I've ever met. You're magnificent."

"Flatterer." Will breathed out a laugh. "Should we go in now?"

Hannibal presumed Dolarhyde would have eliminated everyone inside the house by now and subdued Cornwallis, so he agreed and had Will don his spare plastic suit – too big but that made it all the more adorable on him. Inside they found a bloodbath, raspberry splattered over walls and pooling on the ground throughout the house. As they made their way through the house Will recreated exactly what had happened in his mind, saw a step by step as though he'd murdered them all himself. The live-in maid had been the first to go, gunned down near the top of the stairs when she'd left her room, then had been the eldest teenage son as he'd exited a bathroom. The two youngest Cornwallis children hadn't even made it out of their beds, while the last teenage son had been shot as he'd fled down the back stairs. Inside the master bedroom lay the wife, blood soaked into the fluffy rug there reminding Will of a slaughtered polar bear; odd how that image was the only part he found distasteful. Oliver though, he remained very much alive stood by his bed. Dolarhyde had him pinned in place with the threat of being shot just as his entire family had. Of course Oliver had no way of knowing Dolarhyde wouldn't risk disappointing Hannibal by killing him; no, if forced, the dark-haired alpha would just kneecap him and be done with it.

"Hannibal?" Oliver's brow furrowed deeply the moment he spotted his fellow alpha enter the bedroom. "What the fuck are you doing here?"

"Forgive the rude interruption, I'd not intended to barge in tonight. However, the night was young and Will asked so delightfully."

"What are you fucking talking about? Hannibal who is this bastard?!" He demanded with a nod to Dolarhyde. "What are you wearing and why the hell are you here?"

Hannibal rounded the dead beta woman on the floor with Will right behind him until he was almost within arms distance of Oliver.

"I think I can make you understand exactly why we're here and what has brought you to this fate with a single name. Beverly."

Anger drained from Oliver's face to be replaced by shock, he tried to hide it but not very well. His Adam's apple bobbed as his mind raced to find some way out of the situation he'd found himself in.

Dolarhyde couldn't have cared less about Beverly, he just wanted to kill the family then watch Hannibal finish his painting. Will though, he wanted to watch Oliver suffer and Hannibal would ensure he did just that.

"Who? I don't know what you're talking about. Who- Who the fuck is she?"

"Must you swear so gratuitously?" He sighed and set his medical bag down on the end of the bed, opened it and retrieved his scalpel. "You remind me of a woman who once threatened my mate, Mister Cornwallis, I'll tell you what I told her: If you're going to lie to me, at least have the decency to be good at it."

In one swift motion, before anybody had realized Hannibal had moved, Oliver had been knocked to the bed and rope snared around his ankles – how Hannibal had pulled that from his medical case so quickly remained a mystery. With Oliver's feet bound, Hannibal handed the rope to Will so he could tie it to the bed tightly while he turned his attention to Oliver's wrists, all while Dolarhyde kept a gun on him. Ropes bit into Oliver's flesh, burning and painful.

"The fuck is this?! Let me go, you sick fucking cunt!"

Hannibal's head tilted to one side with a mightily unimpressed expression. "What did I say about gratuitousness, Mister Cornwallis? I believe we'll begin with your tongue to save our eardrums."

So that was exactly what Hannibal did, he took the man's tongue with practised hands and set it aside on the nightstand to drip softly down the wooden drawers. Dolarhyde leaned up against the wall content to watch just as he had with Marsden, but Will drifted ever closer eager to witness the startling beauty that was death. He finally set the cooler he'd been carrying down by his mate's medical case, but those blue eyes of his never left the scene before him.

"Will, brangusis, You saw me take parts from Margot Verger, how would you like to assist this time around?"

"Can I?" A stupid question, Hannibal never would have offered had he not been serious. "I'd like that."

Dolarhyde's eye twitch but he remained silent as Hannibal opened Oliver's abdomen up while the man gargled his own blood and wept. The scalpel moved carefully with only as many cuts as was needed until both kidneys, the liver and intestines were ready for removal. It had been some time since he'd made sausages and knew they'd go down well at the House.

"There you are, Will. All you need do is reach in and pull them out." Will needed no further encouragement, did exactly as told and placed each organ into the cooler for Hannibal to create with later. "Well done, my love, I'll prepare the heart and lungs for you."

"What do humans taste like?" The dark-haired alpha suddenly asked from his corner. "Are they like pigs? Cows maybe? Or is the old saying everything tastes of chicken right?"

"Humans can be mistaken for pork by the untrained palette." Began Hannibal without looking away from his bloody work. "Truthfully there is no exact likeness, humans are our own unique flavor. Yet, if forced to make a comparison, I'd liken human meat to that of veal. It's rather versatile as well, there are a great many dishes to be made."

"You're making me hungry, Doctor Lecter."

That finally had Hannibal glance over his shoulder to Dolarhyde as Will started to pull Oliver's still beating heart out and strike the killing blow.

"Perhaps I shall cook for you one day."

Dolarhyde smiled, an actual smile. "I'd like that."

With organs removed and sat neatly inside the cooler, Hannibal turned his attention to finishing the painting he'd begun with Marsden. Tonight he'd paint the second brother and string him up for the police to find, to finally put the last pieces of the puzzle together. Both he and Dolarhyde knew the FBI would have realized the Chesapeake Ripper and Tooth Fairy had teamed up for Marsden's death, and that surely had to be a terrifying realization for them, but it would soon be over with Oliver's demise. Yes, they'd tackle Marcus Delamare together but Hannibal didn't foresee further collaborations beyond that. They were separate entities killing for very different reasons, there wasn't any need for them to work on top of one another.

"Where are you going to hang him once you're done, Hannibal?"

He couldn't shake the way Will's voice had sounded like a teenager excited to learn; always so adorable was Will.

"The stairs," he replied. "That is where Francis and I hung Marsden, we must have a matching image." He leaned in to kiss his beloved mate. "Once I've made the necessary cuts, would you like to remove his face?"

Was this what true love looked like? That was the question Dolarhyde kept returning to. Hannibal and Will worked together so seamlessly as though they'd been doing it all their lives, they anticipated one another, just one fluid motion after another. He and the Dragon hadn't ever been like that, they argued and couldn't ever work together properly; the medication Hannibal had put him on helped to quiet the Dragon's rage, but did nothing to help them work together. Then there was Reba, he felt something for her he'd never felt for another human being in his life, she wasn't like other omegas. How as it a blind woman could see him so completely? Dolarhyde couldn't be sure she felt that something as well, but he hoped she did and, without the Dragon ordering him to kill Reba, maybe he stood a chance of finding out.

With surprisingly little effort Oliver's face was removed and taken downstairs where it was carefully placed on the accent table beside the front door with Marsden's, which Hannibal had brought with them. Then the three killers carried Oliver's destroyed body to the stairs where he was hung up to complete the painting. The ropes continued to cut into his flesh even after death, an ongoing torment Will hoped he'd suffer in Hell as well.

Only Marcus Delamare remained, he was the last pure evil that needed banishing from the world that could threaten the House. His demise would be the start of a new era for the omegas who'd survived the House and Marcus' auctions. Speaking of surviving omegas, attention soon returned to locating Beverly. They all doubted she'd have been hidden somewhere Oliver's wife stood a chance of stumbling across her, same with the maid, but that hadn't ruled out another hatch in the basement.

"Maybe we should have gotten out of him where she is first." Will mused once they'd concluded she'd not been imprisoned in the basement.

"No need, Will. Francis has already assessed the situation for us during his reconnaissance. He concluded she was either in the basement or somewhere in the nest of sheds and outbuildings hidden away at the back of the property. Beverly is not here-"

"So check the sheds." Will finished for him.

He supposed Hannibal was right, Oliver hadn't seemed all that intelligent or cunning when they'd met at the opera, and nobody could argue with Dolarhyde's ability to survey a location. Hannibal thought of everything, was a master at being prepared, so if he'd felt confident Beverly was in one of those two places then Will was confident Beverly was in one of those two places.

They trekked out to the sheds and outbuildings, some half-collapsed from years of disuse, while others seemed newer and centred around a mechanical building which probably held the backup generator and such. However, instead of cracking them all open to take a look or calling out for Beverly, Hannibal soon spotted one shed with three more locks than all the others. Old fashioned padlocks – heavy duty and brand new.

"Here." Didn't take more than a few seconds for the omega and other alpha to flank him on either side. "Would you like to put those lockpicking skills of yours to good use again, Francis?"

Dolarhyde smiled, even just a hint of Hannibal's praise brightened his day. Soon the padlocks were on the ground forgotten and the door yanked open. Inside they found Beverly half unconscious on a makeshift bed of dirty blankets, she'd been shackled to the wall by a long chain around her neck and – while not as badly beaten as Brian had been – was in a sorry state.

"Get away from me!" Beverly managed to scream when she saw two new alphas enter the room dressed disturbingly and smelling of blood. "Get away!"

"It's okay!" Will pushed passed the two alphas and hurried to the woman's side. "It's me, it's Will."

Beverly's brow furrowed deeply. Will? Will was actually there? Will with two alphas at his back? Every time she thought there were no more tears to shed they burst forth anew to stain her face, tears stun her cheeks as she launched to hug him as best the chain would allow, clung to him just to make sure this wasn't some fantasy and he'd fade away having been a cruel dream.

For a great many moments Will just sat there with her cradled in his arms, rocked her slowly and muttered soothing words to her in a similar tone to the one he'd used when the twins cried. He'd thought the day he'd escaped would be the last he ever saw of Beverly, had started to think they'd never get her back, but there she was in his arms.

She'd jolted away when Hannibal had crouched beside her to release the chain holding her to the wall, but Will had just gone on soothing her.

"Forgive me, Miss Katz, I didn't mean to startle you. My name is Doctor Hannibal Lecter, this is Francis Dolarhyde and you know Will of course. We are here to take you away from this nightmare, you are safe now. I shall carry you to the car."

When Beverly wriggled away from Hannibal, Will placed one hand on his mate's forearm and shook his head.

"It's okay, Hannibal, I can carry her."

Will might have been an omega but that didn't mean he was weak. Since he'd begun eating properly, walking Winston and carrying the twins around, Will had put on some muscle and become deceptively strong.

Thankfully Beverly didn't deny Will and let him carry her away from the shed while Hannibal bagged up the chain and dirty blankets, then did the same with the padlocks.

"Where do you put them all, Doctor Lecter?" Dolarhyde had asked once Will had slipped Beverly into the back seat of the Bentley much as Hannibal had done with himself all that time ago. "You can't keep them at your home."

"No, not my home." Said Hannibal as he placed his medical kit, cooler and the bag of dirty scraps into the trunk of his car. "There is a safe place for them though. Once Marcus is dead and the auctions ended, Miss McClane will need somewhere to recuperate. When that day comes I think it will be time to let you in on our little secret as long as the others agree."

"Others?" Dolarhyde squinted.

"Yes, others."

Sensing he'd not get anything else from the older man and knowing Marcus expected to see him doing his real job that evening, Dolarhyde departed for his own vehicle shortly after; just faded into the night as seamlessly as he'd first joined them. And, with the killing done, painting finished and Beverly rescued, Hannibal soon had them on their way to the House.

# Chapter 10

Once Beverly had been taken back to the House, given proper medical treatment, fed and left to sleep for the night under Barney's watchful eye, the mates had finally been able to return home. As expected, the place was silent and dark, their children had likely gone to bed house ago, so Will had ascended the stairs quietly to change while Hannibal had taken everything to the basement to store neatly away from prying eyes. He'd made quick work of cleaning up and changing into his night things then made his way into the nursery to check on the pups. The pair slept peacefully inside their cribs with their beloved toys like the little angels they were; could the children of two murderers be angels? Was their even a demonic equivalent of cherubs? Hannibal entered the room behind him then and snaked his arms around Will from behind so his chest was to his love's back.

"I've said it before, but we do make beautiful pups, Will." The alpha could say it as many times as he liked as far as Will was concerned, it was a fact after all. Spitting images of their papa but with Will's dark hair. The omega yawned. "You should go to bed, I will check on Abigail then join you. It has been a busy night."

Will managed to spin around in Hannibal's arms to rest his head on the older man's shoulder. "You're right. Thank you for doing it tonight, for bringing Beverly back."

"You are very welcome, but you never need to thank me for giving you what you need. You are my omega, it is my duty as your alpha to ensure you want for nothing."

A tiny laugh escaped Will. "Killing is going above and beyond, don't you think?"

A loving kiss found its way to the top of Will's head. "I take my role as your alpha extremely seriously, Will."

Oh, there wasn't any denying that. Another yawn overtook Will then and Hannibal wasted no time ushering him out of the nursery and toward their bedroom for some real rest. Meanwhile, Hannibal crossed the hall to push Abigail's door open. She rubbed at her eyes as she pushed herself up in her bed.

"Hannibal?"

"Hello, Abigail. Will and I have returned, thank you for watching over your siblings. Beverly is at the House resting, she is safe now."

That startled the teenager to being wide-awake as a smile spread across her face. After a few moments of confirming everything was well and Beverly was indeed free of Oliver's tortures, Hannibal walked to the bed to tuck Abigail back up for the night. He kissed her forehead just as lovingly as he kissed those of Claude and Veronique then backed up to the door once more.

"Night, Hannibal."

"Goodnight, Abigail. There will be a fresh protein scramble in the morning."

With the twins checked on and Abigail tucked in once more, Hannibal slipped into bed with a sleepy Will who always looked so adorable with messy hair and no glasses. There would be time for proper showers in the morning, for now the pair just wanted sleep.

"Did you check on Abigail?"

Will was pulled closer as Hannibal nodded. "I did. She is pleased Beverly is safe but half asleep so I put her back to bed."

If the public ever found out Hannibal was the Chesapeake Ripper it would be all anybody ever remembered about him, the only thing to define him, but Will had seen just how deep and complicated his mate truly was. Even Hannibal likely hadn't realized how much love he was capable of until mating and having pups. Will saw all of it though, saw and adored everything.

~X~

The following morning Hannibal had risen early, showered then made his way into the basement to make those sausages he'd planned on with the parts they'd taken from Oliver. As he worked he listened to the news go on about another Ripper victim found and the grotesque way he'd been posed. While there hadn't been any mention of *The Corpses of the De Witt Brothers* painting – the FBI had likely wanted to keep that morbid connection quiet – media had commented on the team up of two prolific serial killers and what that could mean for the area. Journalists would stir things up as much as they could of course, especially Freddie Lounds, to sell as much as they could as quickly as they could. 'The public has a right to know' was a common statement from many a journalist, but really most of them used it as an excuse to further their own careers. They hounded authorities, harassed families and trampled crime scenes with no regard to who they hurt in the process. No, they didn't do anything for the public's benefit, just their own.

His thoughts were interrupted when Abigail descended the basement stairs with a glass of juice in her hand. She padded closer to him eager to see him work which just earned her a smile from Hannibal.

"They look good."

"I'm glad." He placed the final link of sausages into a metal tray then set about cleaning his equipment down. "Good morning, Abigail."

"Morning." She sipped her orange juice. "The twins are awake and playing in the nursery, Will is still asleep. Do you want me to wake him up for breakfast?"

Hannibal shook his head. "No. Breakfast will be a while yet so let him sleep. I still need to clean things up here and portion the sausages before I cook anything. I will call you all when it is ready."

"Okay. Is he the guy who hurt Beverly?"

"That is correct."

Abigail paused a moment to just look at the tray of meat Oliver Cornwallis had become, then, after another sip of juice, she finally spoke once more.

"You should take the rest to the House. He took from Beverly so she should take it back."

That had Hannibal smile. "I couldn't agree more, Abigail. Now, go back upstairs, we can't have the twins alone for too long."

She didn't need telling twice, just headed upstairs with her drink while Hannibal did what he did best. It was another forty-five minutes before she saw him again. Will had woken and taken over watching the twins to see to their own breakfast so, after feeding Winston, Abigail had found herself at a bit of a loose end. Then the waft of her adoptive father cooking had lured her into the luxury kitchen.

Adoptive might not have been the right word, Abigail didn't technically exist and nor did Will any longer. Dolarhyde had mentioned knowing some people who knew some people who could get pretty detailed fake identities made, something which Hannibal had given serious thought to, but they were expensive. As far as Abigail understood it, were Hannibal to acquire these fake identities for her and Will, they'd be used to gain a marriage licence for he and Will mostly for legal purposes such as proving guardianship rights to the twins, while Abigail's would be used with the reassurance of Omega Lives to legally have Abigail adopted into the Lecter family. Will's lack of proper documentation was the primary reason the twins only had Hannibal's surname rather than going by Lecter-Graham as they'd originally wanted.

Still, none of that was of any great importance that morning, so Abigail just slipped into the kitchen and up to the island. She wasn't sure she'd ever get used to her new home, each room felt more dramatic than the last, everything a performance but amazingly not ostentatious. The various shades of blue throughout the house somehow made her think of the night sky even on the cloudiest of days and what house honestly needed so many fireplaces? What she remembered of the house she'd shared with her birth parents was mostly boring beige and tan colors, somewhere to live with little personality. Now she really thought about it, maybe that had been a result of her father hiding the serial killer he was; Hannibal didn't fear showing it off though, he wanted people to look. No man who cared little for drama and putting on a show had chairs with carved hooves for feet in their living room. Fearless, that was Hannibal – perhaps audacious would have been a better description.

"Is there anything I can do to help? Will is with the twins."

Hannibal flashed her a smile, a more loving and fatherly one that Garret Jacob Hobbs ever had. "You may set the table, that would be of great help. You will find all you need on the third shelf on the right in the closet in the dining room."

"I can do that. I have wondered why it's such a large closet though." Hannibal cocked an eyebrow, everything in his house was lavish, even the closets. "It's just, Will sent me in there a few days ago to get the twin's high chairs out and I – it seemed kind of big for a closet is all."

Abigail didn't remember the closets at her childhood home, but she knew for a fact they wouldn't have been as large. That closet was almost the size of their rooms at the House. Hannibal seemed to read all of her thoughts on her face because he suddenly nodded in understanding.

"That storage closet was originally the pantry while the pantry I have now-" he gestured with his knife to the door in question "- the back staircase. About a year ago I remodelled, closed off the staircase since I never used them and had a custom pantry fitted. Upstairs where that small reading nook that Winston likes to curl up by is, that was where the stairs originally let out. It is more functional this way."

She supposed that explained why the closet was so large. Without any further questions Abigail saw to setting the table while Hannibal finished breakfast and made coffee. Will had once accused the coffee method of requiring a degree to operate it, but nobody could argue with how good Hannibal's coffee came out. Soon Abigail had set the table and brought the high chairs out so the twins could join them, then went to call Will to eat at Hannibal's behest. Swiftly everybody assembled, including Winston who wasn't ever far from Will's side when he was home, and they all sat down to fill their bellies.

"Wonderful as always, Hannibal." Complemented Will after a bite of eggs.

"I'm glad to hear it." Oh he was, Hannibal wouldn't go fishing for complements, but he'd soak them up when genuinely and freely offered.

They discussed their days as they ate, Hannibal had a few patients to see and Will wanted to have a lazy day with the children, Abigail though, she intended to read whatever she could get her hands on in an attempt to regain her literacy. This was something Hannibal admired, her determination and drive to not let her past at the House define her. Will would, of course, assist in any way he could since he'd spent the last year doing exactly the same, but Hannibal made a mental note to purchase pens, pencils, notebooks and anything else which would aid in her learning.

~X~

Dolarhyde had managed to provide Hannibal with the link to the latest of Marcus' auction catalogues, something Hannibal's curiosity had all but forced him to look at. Hannibal had done some truly dark things in his life, most would likely label him a monster, but that catalogue had put his evils to shame; made the Chesapeake Ripper look like a fuzzy kitten. Each omega had been stripped naked and photographed from all sides, they came with lot numbers and a basic description such as their height, weight and age. The youngest Hannibal had seen advertised was eight, younger than Abigail had been when Mason Verger had stolen her away from everything she knew. The whole thing was a sick pornographic menu for rich lowlifes with no decorum. Anger bubbled up inside him as he waited for his next patient to arrive, Hannibal Lecter didn't give into his anger though so took a few calming breaths as he tried to force memories of Mischa out of his mind. His sweet sister hadn't deserved her fate and nor did the children Marcus Delamare sold into sexual slavery. Hannibal had already begun to suspect Veronique would present as an omega when the time came, she was just as dainty and quiet as Mischa had been at that age, and Hannibal wouldn't for one second risk her being spirited away by somebody like Marcus. Vladis Grutas had paid for what he'd done to Mischa – what he'd made Hannibal do to Mischa, and he'd continue to pay with Chiyoh as his warden until the day he finally perished inside that cage. Marcus' death would come much sooner, but he'd suffer first, Will would insist upon it.

A glance to his watch had Hannibal set his tablet aside and rise from his seat. He'd been making quite some progress with Albert Stanley as of late and had no intentions of jeopardizing that. A normal day was called for, it was what Will and Abigail had wanted, some peace after all the death and trauma, maybe that was what Hannibal needed as well.

Another dinner party was in order as well, he missed the excitement of tantalizing the palette and creating edible masterpieces. Perhaps he'd be able to coax Will down to join them again and use it as an excuse to show of Abigail as the latest member of his family. Abigail Lecter did have a nice

ring to it. Procuring those fake identities was something he'd need to devote some time to as well, get Dolarhyde to act as a middle man for him. Will would likely be fine keeping his real name as long as they edited his state of birth, Abigail was a different story. The Minnesota Shrike wasn't a forgotten memory, people remembered his name and the daughter who'd survived; Abigail could stay for that was a common enough name, the Hobbs would need changing though. Hopefully she'd not have too many objections since she'd not have to keep it very long. With Alana's unwitting help he'd hurry adoption papers through and soon have her legally his and Will's daughter.

# Chapter 11

After all the murder, blood and Beverly doing her best to recover, something of a lighter nature had been called for. Thankfully that presented itself rather quickly with Abigail's fifteenth birthday. She'd been content to ignore the occasion entirely, had gone so far as to use the phrase 'no big deal' when asked about it. Although, Will hadn't been inclined to agree and had insisted she have some sort of celebration – a pot calling the kettle black situation if one were to ask Hannibal. So, the day of her fifteenth birthday finally arrived and the mates had gotten the whole event planned out. They'd not throw some loud party but rather sit down to an exceptional lunch with presents and birthday cake. As Will had put it: 'nothing excessive but still a birthday.' Hannibal had cleared his schedule for the day just to ensure the cake was as fresh and perfect as possible. Birthday cakes were something Hannibal would surely have to perfect now he had three children. Not thinking birthdays to be all that important was something he, Will and Abigail shared, but after so long locked up in the House, the mates had felt she deserved a taste of a normal family life; and normal families took notice when their eldest daughter's birthday rolled around.

Arrangements had been made for Price to bring her closest friends over from the House at noon to join them so the lunch wasn't just another family meal but rather something a little more festive. Getting Brian and Beverly to interact with Hannibal more was also something he'd planned; they might not have fled to a corner every time they saw him now, but Beverly clearly still didn't trust him – exceptionally smart was that one – while Brian seemed to go out of his way to avoid any form of conversation with him. Will had noticed these things and they'd upset him, he wanted his dearest friends to accept Hannibal into the bizarre friend group he'd managed to form.

Getting the majority of the omegas out of the House for a while would also work in their favor because, as of three days previous, Omega Lives – and therefore Hannibal – had officially purchased the land and building from the government. Frankly, the government had seemed happy to have it taken off their hands. With the deeds to validate their reason for being out in the woods, Hannibal and Alana had made arrangements for some of the building's issues to be repaired. The place had no proper heating or ventilation so a HVAC system needed installing, but the foundations needed properly evaluating before any of that happened, so Abigail's little get-together would surface for the evaluation. Barney and Josh had been placed in charge of overseeing it while Hannibal and Alana were away – though they had far more faith in Barney than Josh.

Of course they'd told Abigail what they'd planned, surprising her wouldn't have turned out well and, knowing it was only a small gathering without Hannibal's traditional overly formal flare, she'd eventually conceded. So when she answered the door at almost exactly noon, she wasn't surprised to find their guests gathered on her doorstep, just greeted them and ferried them through the foyer and into the ornate living room.

Normally Hannibal hired a staff for his dinner parties, had a series of regulars to hand out canapés before the meal itself, but this was to be a significantly more casual occasion and so Hannibal was an army of one. Knowing Will was upstairs getting the twins dressed properly after they'd been playing with Winston in the yard, Hannibal finished the mirror glaze and moved the cake to set before he donned his suit jacket and made his way into the dining room to play perfect host.

"Good afternoon everyone, thank you for joining us." He flashed them all that practised smile he'd worked so hard on over the years. "Would any of you care for wine? I do also have beer, Alana."

Soon chilled wine had been poured as well as a beer for Alana, and Will had joined them all with the twins who toddled between people intent on getting as much attention as they could. Veronique a vision in the jacquard white and beige dress she wore, while Claude was a carbon copy of Hannibal in his shirt and dress pants. Will had insisted children as young as the twins didn't need clothes from Fendi, but, while Hannibal allowed Will to wander around in jeans and off the rack shirts most of the time, the twins were born Lecters and had standards to keep. Ultimately it was Hannibal's money so Will had just gone along with it.

Since having the twins, Hannibal had grown accustom to finding either Will or Abigail sat on the floor, so he hardly batted at eye at Abigail sat beside the chair Will occupied stroking Winston. Casual wasn't something which came naturally to Hannibal, but that didn't in any way mean he was incapable of it. So, after returning from the kitchen with the drink he'd made specially for Abigail, he handed it over and took his own seat.

"What's this?" She asked while inspecting the fizzy concoction filled with blueberries in her hand. "Smells great."

"While you may be another year older, you are still below drinking age, so I thought a mocktail would be to your tastes. A mixture of blueberries juice, club soda, honey and fresh mint with vanilla infused blueberries."

God, even his mocktails had to be dramatic. That said, Abigail seemed pleasantly delighted with her drink and even let Veronique have a sip. Conversation went on for a while as they enjoyed their drinks and waited on lunch. Hannibal had invited them over for noon with the intention of serving thirty minutes later, a polite and appropriate amount of time.

Though things were much more relaxed with the guests only consisting of: Alana, Beverly, Brian and Price, there was one person who didn't quite seem inclined to slip into casualness so swiftly. Beverly had only been rescued from Oliver a handful of months ago and couldn't have been expected to simply bounce back in that time. The others were all people she knew and trusted, but trusting an alpha who'd rescued her in the middle of the night while wearing a plastic suit was something which would take time. Via Omega Lives many of the House's former omegas had found therapy with Hannibal and a handful of other doctors such as Bedelia Du Maurier, but Beverly had resisted the idea of speaking to anybody when Alana had raised it. Burying trauma would only hurt her in the long run and, unfortunately, they could only wait for her to realize that.

Hannibal let none of his thoughts regarding Beverly distract him from the day though, his pups were happy, his mate had even laughed a few times, so all was well. Eventually that half an hour passed though and lunch was served, a lunch which began with wilted rainbow chard and roasted garlic tarts wit a lightly pickled salad, and ended with the birthday cake Hannibal had worked so hard on with a fish course in between. Fish wasn't Hannibal's favorite thing to work with since he'd not encountered very many rude fish, but Will had caught them himself and Hannibal hadn't wanted to put Will's hard work to shame. Once lunch had finished, Hannibal was pleased to see his guests happy and full, seeing people enjoy his food would always be gratifying.

He didn't get to linger in it too long though for Alana soon insisted it was time to open presents – presents Abigail hadn't been expecting – which had found them all back in the living room. As it turned out, the majority of them had all had the same idea to get Abigail books and writing paraphernalia to help assist in her regaining her ability to read and write properly. Alana had even been kind enough to top it all off with a rather adorable pencil case shaped like a fox. Will had opted for something a little different with waders and a starter kit for fishing; Hannibal wouldn't

ever understand the appeal, but Abigail enjoyed the outdoors just as much as Will and this was something he hoped they could do together. Hannibal's present came last and was by far the heaviest. A fairly large rectangular box wrapped delicately in black paper with a green velvet bow which she'd eyed suspiciously for several moments before opening. Inside she found a brand new laptop which both astounded and confused the teenage girl.

"What's this for?" She questioned curiously as she lifted the lid.

"Well, you have shown great interest in your education, so I thought a laptop to assist in your online classes would be best."

That had Abigail's brow furrow deeply as she peered up at Hannibal who pulled a small envelope out of his inner pocket to give her. That contained a set of papers and what she eventually determined was adoption requests.

"I still don't understand, Hannibal, I thought you couldn't adopt me because it would bring the police to us."

"True." He nodded. "Look at the name though. Abigail Jones rather than Abigail Hobbs."

"You know people who can get you fake identities?" That was the first proper sentence Brian had ever said to Hannibal and it earned him a nod.

"Indeed I do. It has taken months of work but Abigail and Will both have identification good enough to stand up to all but the most through of tests. With Alana's assistance, I and Will have made steps toward adopting Abigail officially. It will be some time yet before all the paperwork is completed and I'm told there will be 'home visits' to check on her, but other than that, Abigail is our daughter. With official guardianship of you, I am perfectly within my rights to sign you up for online classes."

Physically attending class wasn't something she felt ready for and Hannibal wouldn't push her; online courses would do just fine.

"Is this okay with you, Abigail?" Will questioned with a sudden wave of nervousness. "You don't have to worry about being a Jones for very long, it's just a common name is all."

"You're really going to be my dads?"

The mates nodded in unison and that was what finally had Abigail bolt into Will's arms. She'd not had a proper family since the age of nine and here were two men who'd gone to such lengths to make her part of theirs. Omegas usually struggled to be adopted for a few different reasons, the main one being many beta families didn't know or want to know how to properly care for an omega and their needs, but there were some others. Adoption services often didn't like to place young omegas in households with alphas due to the possibility of an alpha father going into rut and forcibly mating said omega. Evolution had come up with a handy little trick to avoid inbreeding where an omega in head would smell heavenly to all alphas except those of the same bloodline, they'd find the smell repulsive. Of course, with adoption, that handy trick of nature was null and void. Though infrequent, there had also been cases of omega parents treating the new omega child as a threat to their mate's attention as well. Abigail was sixteen though, two years and she'd be a legal adult capable of doing as she pleased by their standards, then there was Hannibal's stellar reputation and total lack of a criminal record. He was well beyond financially stable, publicly associated with an established omega charity, mated with children of his own and Lithuanian

nobility; if that didn't help to shift things along then nothing would. It hadn't even been three years yet Hannibal had gone from a confirmed bachelor to father of three with a loving mate … and Hannibal wouldn't change a moment of it.

# Chapter 12

The semi-constant insistence of Missus Komeda that Hannibal throw another of his lavish dinner parties had finally bore fruit. Hannibal had wanted to throw another one for quite some time but with everything going on between the House and his home life with Will, it had taken quite a while to fine the best time. Still, Missus Komeda had congratulated herself at every available opportunity for wearing him down; to be perfectly honest, had Hannibal not had such respect for her work and appreciated that she was one of the few who did genuinely care for those around her, Hannibal would have likely eaten her as pâté years ago. A dinner party was just what he needed, what he took such pleasure in, those little cannibalism jokes and listening to his guests praise him while totally unaware he'd turned them into cannibals as well.

Will would have rather never attended another of Hannibal's dinner parties if at all possible. Too many people, too much conversation and him always wondering if he showed Hannibal up by the way he chewed or, God forbid, use the wrong fork. Being surrounded by so many alphas wasn't something he enjoyed either. Of course, logically, Will knew being an alpha didn't automatically make one a rapist monster, he also knew Hannibal being a thoroughbred gave him a sort of dominant alpha aura at social events All that said, Missus Komeda seemed to honestly like Will and he could always use the excuse of checking on the twins to get himself a few moments of peace.

Eventually the evening finally arrived and Hannibal's guests arrived wearing their finest. Will and Abigail had been upstairs in the nursery avoiding the hired servers for several hours playing with the twins while Hannibal finished preparations. Missus Komeda would basically demand to see the twins, so Will had shifted their sleep schedule a little to have them awake a bit later in the day but still have them sleep through the night. Veronique looked beautiful in her crimson dress, but it was her hair which amazed all who saw her, it was longer, thicker and much more luxurious than other toddlers her age. Will always delighted in combing his fingers through those chestnut curls. His sweet pup with the resplendent hair. Claude's hair might have shared Will's hair color, but his hair felt much more like Hannibal's; was naturally straight and wanted to drape over his forehead as it got longer. Hannibal's bed hair was one of Will's favorite sights, when it brushed his eyes and made him look a decade younger.

"Will?" He turned to face the younger omega. "Is this dress okay?"

For a moment Will found himself confused, but then it dawned on him that Abigail had never attended one of the dinner parties before and had no real idea what to expect beyond Hannibal's amazing cooking. While not used to it, Will had at least got some experience with the whole thing. Did she think she looked ugly? Not up to the standards of Hannibal and his so-called friends? Subconsciously Will stretched a hand up to brush fingers against his omega collar.

"You look lovely, Abigail. Didn't you and Abigail go shopping for that dress?"

"Well, yeah, she always dresses so nice so I thought she'd know what to choose, and Hannibal said it's nice. I just don't want to embarrass Hannibal."

"That won't happen, Abigail." Will assured her. "Green suits you just like red suits Hannibal or blue on Claude. There's no need to worry, and if you do find it's too much I'll fake one of the twins being fussy so you can escape for a while."

She smiled at that, felt a little better in herself and scooped Claude up. Meanwhile, downstairs Hannibal had much to do. The staff he'd hired were used to his home and how he liked things done, so there was little issue on that front. Everything was in the oven, the wine had been opened to breathe, the only problem was Winston who'd started yelping after he got shut out in the yard for the evening. There shouldn't have been a problem with that to begin with, he'd had a heated dog house fitted with a little shelter any dog could have dreamed of, yet Hannibal supposed Winston objected to being barred from Will, Hannibal could understand that. That had been the catalyst for him seeking his beloved omega out to sooth the animal. He entered the nursery to find his family with a gradually easing tension floating around.

"Everything all right?"

Will nodded. "Fine. Abigail was just a little worried she'd made the wrong dress choice."

"Nonsense," Hannibal was quick to say. "You look perfect. Very lovely, as does my other girl." In hardly a handful of steps he was across the floor to Will to press a kiss to the top of Veronique's head. "Will, Winston is making rather a lot of noise, clearly he wants your attention. Please calm him down, perhaps give him some of those cookie treats he likes so much."

"I can do that. Can you carry Claude so Abigail can finish getting ready?"

"Of course." Abigail happily handed over Claude then hurried off to her own room to put on her shoes and the necklace Hannibal had bought her as a late birthday present; just a thin double chain of gold which complemented her skin tone, very minimalist as she preferred. "Would you like to pet Winston, Claude? I don't think that will be a problem as long as you promise not to get grass stains on your clothes."

Will chuckled to himself as they descended the stairs and made for the backyard, while they had started talking a while ago, neither of the twins were quite ready for negotiation or promises. Still, watching Hannibal chat with the pups was another of Will's favorite sights so he'd not object.

As soon as they stepped out into the yard Winston barrelled towards them for attention and to sniff at the twins' shoes.

"He's lonely, you know. Abigail and I spend so much time with the twins or at the House, and you go to work. I know I try to take him most places with me, but he still needs proper company of his own, Hannibal. Maybe we could get another dog?"

"Surely Winston is enough?" Will pouted and Hannibal did his best not to crack. "We shall discuss it another time."

Before Will could try tempting him more, he kissed Claude's temple then set him down on the patio to pet Winston and headed back inside.

"Don't worry." If he spoke to himself, the twins, Winston or all of the above was unclear. "There'll be a pack before long."

~X~

Time passed on as it always did until eventually the guests began to arrive. In his mind twelve people attending was a small dinner party, but the number had quietly terrified Abigail who'd still not come downstairs; at least Alana's attendance had helped ease her nerves. Mister and Missus Komeda were among the last to arrive which was unusual for them, Missus Komeda dressed in a bold shade of red which, when paired with her short bob, gave off an art deco vibe, while Mister Komeda could have blended into the background as he often did.

"I can't tell you how much I've been looking forward to this, Hannibal."

He flashed her a cheerful smile. "I'm glad to have created such a sense of anticipation."

Hardly three minutes later they'd joined the other guests in the ballroom where light canapés were rotated along with drinks and chatter echoed off the walls.

"Where is that handsome mate of yours and those delightful babies? I swear, Veronique gets more beautiful every time I see her."

While Hannibal had no issue agreeing his youngest did grow more wonderful by the day, he didn't know 'every time' could really enter into it, she'd only encountered them twice in passing.

"They're right here." Both Hannibal and Missus Komeda cast their eyes over to the entryway to see Will stood with the children on either side of him looking like the perfect Lecter children they were – very good walkers they'd become. "Alana texted, she's almost at the door."

Yes, that explained Will's sudden appearance with their pups rather than Missus Komeda's desire to see them. Of course the beta woman didn't know that and promptly went to greet them where she even earned a little handshake from Claude.

"This one is going to be a heartthrob for sure, just like his papa. I can tell these things, you know. Saw it in my nephew when he was about this age and he did not disappoint. That boy has brains and looks."

Will breathed out a laugh because, while exceptionally handsome and the most perfect mate Will could have ever asked for, heartthrob didn't suit Hannibal, it sounded too … casual. Alana entered then having been admitted by one of the staff, dressed in black and the twins instantly lost all interest in Missus Komeda in favor of their Aunt Alana. The beta woman hadn't seemed to mind though because she'd easily slipped into another conversation.

"Did you tell Abigail that Alana was arriving?" Will confirmed he had just as the teenager in question finally made an appearance. "Speak of the devil."

She slipped into the room almost sheepishly, like she'd have rather watched them through a two way mirror or something; observing without being observed. Hannibal quickly worked to put her at ease by encouraging her to stand where she would be flanked on either side by her new fathers and opposite Alana.

"This is really fancy, Hannibal." Said Alana as she glanced around the room at all the famous and influential people. "And something smells great."

"I aim to please, Alana. Will and Abigail have been looking forward to your arrival." He kissed Will lightly. "Now, please excuse me. There are some last minute things I must attend to in the kitchen."

With the protection of the only alpha any of them truly trusted, the trio subconsciously moved further from the other guests. It wasn't long before the twins grew tired but that was to be expected, even with the slight change to their sleep schedule it was still way passed their bedtime, so Will had taken them to bed while Alana tried to help Abigail navigate the small clusters of chatting guests.

"I don't believe we've met." Said one man as he reached for another drink off a passing tray. "I'm Doctor George De Vreese of the Baltimore Museum of Art."

That probably would have sounded impressive if Abigail had cared even an iota about art, still she'd nodded politely and tried to take her role of host in Hannibal's and Will's absence seriously.

"A pleasure to meet you, Doctor De Vreese." God she hoped she'd copied Hannibal's fake smile properly. "I'm Abigail Lecter, this is Alana Bloom."

"Ah yes, you're the adopted girl Hannibal's mentioned." She kept it off her face as best she could but that comment had hurt. She'd never escape the truth that she wasn't blood, but Will kept telling her blood didn't make family and she wanted to believe him. De Vreese turned his attention to the older woman then clearly unaware of the wound he'd just inflicted on Abigail. "I'm afraid I'm not familiar with your name. What is it you do?"

"Charity work." She took a large swig of her drink wishing it were a cold beer. "I operate Omega Lives. Hannibal has devoted much time and effort to the charity in the last few years, he's helping us grow in leaps and bounds."

"Yes, Hannibal does always seem to have his fingers in a lot of pies. I suppose it was just a matter of time before charity work became another of them. What is it specifically Omega Lives does? Is there some area of special concern?"

While a perfectly reasonable question, Alana nor Abigail had been able to shake the feeling that De Vreese thought omegas needed a slap and told to calm down more than anything else. It might not have been in his words, but it was certainly in his voice. This alpha had no real care for anything Alana said and probably assumed Hannibal's association with the charity to be down to publicity or some kind of tax write-off.

"We work primarily with abused omegas. We assist in finding them safe places to live, getting jobs and therapy." Well, that was the official story of what they did. Since Hannibal had killed Jack Crawford and taken the House for his own, there had been rather a lot of rescues from trafficking too. "Hannibal is making a real difference."

Fortunately, the mates re-entered then and Hannibal managed to perform subtle damage control until they all sat down to eat. Will had been forced to keep the smirk off his face while Hannibal gave his little pre-dinner speech; when one was aware of the cannibal jokes, one found it hard not to be amused. The strategic placement of Missus Komeda and her husband had created a sort of barrier between Hannibal's family, Alana and the other guests which had done wonders to ease the tensions of Abigail and Alana. Each new meal brought out somehow seemed more intricate and flavorful than the last – the spring duck tartare with seaweed salad had earned much praise – and, as the night went on, conversation became easier for the family. Hannibal was a master conversationalist, knew exactly what to say and where, thankfully he also knew how to deflect attention from his mate and daughter without anybody noticing as well. So, by the time the main course of beef with less beef in it than the guests would have expected had been served, Abigail had managed to answer questions without the awkward pauses.

"Miss Bloom tells me you've begun a partnership with Omega Lives, Hannibal." De Vreese began when their last topic of conversation had come to a natural end.

"We knew you'd helped out, but didn't realized you'd officially joined the charity." Sometimes it caught people off-guard when Mister Komeda spoke, his wife normally did the talking for both of them after all.

"Originally yes, I'd offered my services to those Alana was caring for, but I've found myself with a much larger role there than anticipated." Lying by using the truth, Hannibal's speciality. "I've found it rather rewarding and quite enlightening."

"That's our Hannibal," Missus Komeda grinned. "Always so selfless."

Nobody at that tabled believed that for a moment. Hannibal was many things but selfless wasn't among them, he could be generous when he desired to be, but ultimately everything Hannibal did was for himself and his family.

One of the other female guests, the CFO of a marketing company, piped up from the far end of the table then. This was the first time she'd attended one of Hannibal's dinner parties but she'd managed to ingratiate herself rather well.

"What is it you plan on doing Abigail? Your father is a man of many talents, are there any you wish to follow?"

Having a future wasn't really something Abigail had thought about or even realized was an option until Will and Hannibal had brought her into their home. Nothing jumped out at her though, perfecting her spelling and reading was Abigail's biggest dream for the time being, but she suspected that wouldn't have been a wise response.

"I like the charity and the way Hannibal can help people, the way he's helping put a stop to omega mistreatment. I want to be like him."

The dinner guests might have thought that admirable, but Will and Hannibal knew exactly what 'put a stop' had meant. Abigail might have been the Minnesota Shrike's daughter by blood, but every day she became more and more like the Chesapeake Ripper and he would happily train her in the ways of death should she wish it.

Dinner continued onto the next topic after that which was the opera, something the majority of the guests could discuss for hours if left unchecked and the Lecters were perfectly willing to do so for the most part. Talk of the opera lasted until dessert – a mango and raspberry parfait with coconut sorbet – when things had taken a sharp turn toward the macabre. Odd how the moment conversation had turned to death both Will and Abigail had become more involved and animated.

"Have you all read about that serial killer going around?" De Vreese asked out of the blue. "Not the Chesapeake Ripper or the Tooth Fairy, I mean the new one stalking the streets. The Flag Killer the papers are calling him. Dreadful business." He swallowed another mouthful of parfait. "Sounded like some sort of copycat of the Ripper, if you ask me."

The confusion in the CFO's voice was evident to the Lecters even from the opposite end of the table. "Don't you all think it's a little alarming there are so many serial killers concentrated in such a small area."

"Not necessarily," stated Hannibal with that smooth accent of his. "America is a large country, so there could conceivably be at least fifty active serial killers at any one time. That's enough for one per state."

"Surely fifty is too high a number."

"Not at all, Mister Komeda. Just because law enforcement is unaware of a serial killer does not mean they aren't there."

Missus Komeda sipped her drink before making a show of shivering. "You make it sound like they could be anywhere, Hannibal."

Oh if she only knew. Hannibal was one of the most prolific serial killers to have ever lived, he'd gathered multiple nicknames over the years and wouldn't stop killing until someone stopped him. Dolarhyde was the same, only his own death would end his killings. Then there were Will and Abigail, they were budding serial killers themselves.

"Why do they call him the Flag Killer?" For the first time that night Abigail sounded honestly interested. "The Tooth Fairy is a taunt clearly, the Chesapeake Ripper based on location and his skills." Sweet Abigail, complementing her father ever so subtly.

"Oh, you don't know? He skins his victims, then mounts them on a pole impaled in their chests." De Vreese clearly thought he'd found a way to frighten Abigail, but something so bloody wouldn't ever frighten her, not before she'd become a Lecter and certainly not afterwards. "*Tattlecrime* referred to his latest killing as – what was it? Ah, yes. 'A bloody moon landing.' Poor writing, no idea why I keep reading it."

A few comments all enforcing everyone's belief that this killer was a vicious monster that police needed to get off the streets were passed around while Abigail pondered just how much skill it would take to flay a person in an unfamiliar site, display it and leave without being caught. Will found himself thinking of the Flag Killer's process and how he chose his victims. Then there was Hannibal, he'd read about the Flag Killer of course but had largely ignored him since he'd had more important things to deal with. Hannibal's years as a psychiatrist allowed him to quickly track down the likely reason for his actions though; ownership. The Flag Killer was claiming his kills even in death. He was almost certainly an alpha, there hadn't *ever* been a reported omegan serial killer – though there was Will blossoming into one beside him – while betas likely wouldn't have possessed the patience to carry out such a design as Will would surely call it. Flaying wasn't something one just tried out one day, this alpha knew exactly what he was doing and had the skill to do it cleanly in one piece. Likely a sadist as well, flaying someone alive was a time consuming torture, he didn't stab or strangle them, he let shock, blood loss and hypothermia do it for him; infection if they lived long enough. In history, flaying was an execution as well as a torture, a sentence for treason, so perhaps the Flag Killer was punishing his victims for some perceived atrocity.

"Probably has medical training." Said Will, it was clear his internal thoughts had slipped out without him noticing.

Still, such a topic wasn't suitable for a dinner party where most of the guests weren't aware of how many killers were present. Even Alana knew Hannibal had killed, but she'd thought it was just Jack and the guards; justified killings. With a little help from Missus Komeda, Hannibal soon shifted the conversation away from murderers even though he would have rather enjoyed the discussion and shortly after coffee had been served. Once it had been drunk, the evening hadn't lasted much longer, maybe just forty-five minutes before people finally left with the Komedas being last.

Will collapsed into an armchair in the living room which had Abigail chuckle. "I'm so glad they're gone."

"Come now, Will. It wasn't that bad." Remarked Hannibal as he pulled Will up into an embrace and kissed him lovingly.

"If you two are going to be lovey-dovey I'll go check on Winston."

It was Will's turn to chuckle then because lovey-dovey didn't suit Hannibal in the slightest just as with heartthrob.

"We're your parents now, Abigail." Will called out to her as she left the room. "It's our duty to embarrass you."

He snuggled into his alphas strong chest then fully aware Hannibal would probably have to force his face into the mattress to keep Will from waking their children up.

# Chapter 13

Will had, of course, gone into heat since having the twins, but they'd chosen to keep him on birth control. Will had been fine with that … until he wasn't. The birth control had made sense what with everything going on in their lives and, after years of those illegal suppressants, Hannibal hadn't wanted to overburden Will's system. Yet, as Claude and Veronique grew, Will had found himself almost constantly thinking about another pup. He should have been happy with the twins and now Abigail, but that innate omega drive kept screaming at him to give his mate another pup. So, without telling anybody, Will had just stopped taking his pills as his heat drew near.

Hannibal had smelt Will's heat begin to take hold of him, he always smelt it but never made a move until Will showed signs of growing need. He had, however, taken Abigail and the twins over to the House for a few days where Alana, Price and Beverly could watch over them.

It was as they sat watching one of the nature documentaries Will liked that he began rubbing his thighs together, unable to ignore the slickness any longer. Hannibal's maroon eyes just watched him for a few moments delighting in the growing desperation.

"Hannibal."

"Something you need, mylimasis?" He teased. "Tell me all about it."

"I- I did something." That had Hannibal raise an eyebrow questioningly. "I stopped – stopped taking my birth control."

Hannibal sat up straight, television totally forgotten and for a moment Will worried he'd angered his mate.

"You stopped? Will, you know that means you'll be pregnant at your heat's end. Are you totally sure that is what you want?"

With desperate heat pooling inside him, Will shifted to straddle the older man, exposing his mating bite enticingly.

"Very sure. I wouldn't have stopped taking it if I wasn't. Is – is that okay?"

Hannibal would give Will a thousand pups if that was what he wanted. No, he'd be delighted for them to have another one. They kissed deeply until Will's scent and need became too strong for Hannibal to ignore. He lifted the omega up, carried him upstairs without parting their lips once, then pressed Will down onto the bed of blue sheets.

"Please, Hannibal. Need you."

The alpha growled as clothes were pulled off and cast aside, his tongue lavished Will's mating bite causing the omega to mew and purr with delight. Will naked before him slightly sweaty, breathing deeply and leaking slick was by far the most tantalizing sight Hannibal had ever had the good fortune to witness, more beautiful than any delicacy he could prepare.

Kisses caressed every inch of the omega's skin, first his neck where Hannibal scraped his teeth over Will's scent gland pulling a plethora of moans from the omega. Next the soft kisses trailed

downward to tease the beautiful raised bud that was Will's nipple, he paid it special attention, treated Will's nipple to the lavished attention it deserved before his kisses moved southward.

"… alpha." The word practically tumbled from the dark-haired omega's parted lips.

"Omega."

Soon Hannibal had firmly settled between Will's flushed thighs, which were spread obscenely wide by this point; a masterpiece. The rich scent of omega washed over Hannibal, permeated his lungs and set his soul on fire. After a kiss to that sweet patch of skin where thigh met hip, then Hannibal took Will into his mouth. A wanton moan escaped the younger man as his long fingers snared themselves in the crumbled sheets.

"Alpha!."

So desperate, so stimulated and flooded with endorphins was Will that he didn't stand a chance of lasting all that long; not when Hanibal's mouth was so hot and his tongue so surprisingly talented in more than just word play. Hips bucked up with increasing need to the point the alpha had to hold Will's hips down. Each brush of Hannibal's tongue, each kiss and suck had the omega crying out for more, more, *more* until, with a screamed 'alpha', Will came.

Hannibal glanced up at his stunning boy from between his legs just as Will peered down, and even though his pupils were blown, covered in sweat and desperate. A large hand caressed up and down Will's thighs, calloused skin from years of surgery and murder traced porcelain flesh as though it were his coveted prize. and frankly it was. Will was so beautiful splayed out before him at Hannibal's mercy. Every breathy pant to leave the younger man's throat just another invitation for Hannibal to help himself to any part of his sweet mate.

Soon those big hands found their way to the most intimate part of Will, the part that belonged to no other alpha. Will's head fell back and his spine arched dramatically as copious amounts of slick coated the older man's fingers. Not that he'd really been trying to but Hannibal couldn't hide his desire any longer, not when Will released such a divine fragrance. He thrust his hard length deep into the mattress to ease a little of his own desire.

"Hannibal!" Will moaned demandingly. "Need you!"

Truthfully it was hearing his own name on Will's tongue, that unmistakable Louisianan accent adding something indescribable to the situation. This wasn't making love though, it wasn't delicate or a maiden's first time. This was an alpha breeding an omega. It was heat and rut, something primeval.

Hannibal sat back on his haunches and Will's hand instinctively found his cock but Hannibal easily slapped it away. Blue eyes peered up at the alpha, half-lidded and mouth open in silent protest while Hannibal smirked at him devilishly.

"Turn over, my little omega." Hannibal ordered in a deep, gravelly voice; his accent always grew thicker when aroused and, by God, did it make Will want him.

Will shuddered before flipping himself over and eagerly presenting to the older man; Hannibal's smirk only grew. Normally making Will Graham do as he was told was pretty much an impossibility, but when in heat he followed orders so swiftly.

His pale skin had flushed a delightful shade of pinkish-red, and the only blemish was the slash wound he'd received in that factory. Hannibal couldn't help himself, he teasingly ran two fingers up the cleft of Will's backside then up his spine as if Will were a priceless jewel. Each touch was soft and gentle until it wasn't. In an abrupt, sudden movement Hannibal grabbed Will by the back of the neck and forced his head down into the bed; not violently or so Will couldn't breathe, just enough to push him into a more extreme position and remind him just how powerful his alpha really was.

Will couldn't take the anticipation much longer and Hannibal couldn't deny his beautiful mate. So, whispered words of love, Hannibal finally entered the omega with a grunt and sharp, powerful thrusts; a clear sign of an alpha taking his omega.

Will's spine was caressed by Hannibal's loving kisses, each one sent a new pleasurable spark tingling through his heated body. By this point Will had had essentially positioned himself so his ass was in the air while his upper chest, arms and face were all firmly pressed into the mattress; a position Hannibal couldn't resist perfecting a little more by leaning over Will deepening each snap of his hips.

When Hannibal's lips again found Will's scarred scent gland part of him wanted to bite down again, mark him again, but he was Will's mate not a rabid dog. Instead, he laced the fingers of their right hands together as he thrust deep into the younger man. Each moan, groan and mew a gift from omega to alpha.

"Alpha! Yes! Breed me."

Yes, that'd make another pup. Nothing of the past could hurt them now, not when they had their family around them.

Will came again, clenched around Hannibal's cock nearly pulled him over the edge as well but not yet. With his rut having fully taken him Hannibal hammered into the younger man while he pinned him down dominantly until finally, *finally*, his knot slipped passed that heavenly ring of muscle and locked the pair together. Hannibal came with a deep moan. Hannibal's noises of euphoria sounded like a grunt, more wolf-like while Will's were more delicate, almost like an angel being deflowered.

"I love you, Will." Breathed Hannibal as he basked in their connection.

"I love you, too."

~X~

When Will's heat had finally drawn to a close, Abigail and the twins had been able to return home with Winston. It had been nice to have them back, the 'whole family under one roof' as Will had put it. It would be a little while before they knew for sure Will was pregnant, but his heat had ended a day earlier than they'd expected which was a good sign. Hannibal would surely be able to smell it on Will just as he had with the twins before long. Seeing Will walk around the house already overjoyed had warmed Hannibal's chilly heart.

During their brief absence from the House, many of the needed renovations had been conducted, the HVAC had been installed a few months ago and there had been a few extra windows added,

while the original windows had been replaced with better insulated ones. Hannibal's office had also been overhauled to something more acceptable while a wall had been knocked through Alana's old room to give her an office as well. The next big task would be clearing trees for a proper driveway and small parking lot. There wasn't any need to hide themselves out in the woods now they owned the land and operated under the banner of Omega Lives.

With his attention again mostly focused on the House, Hannibal had almost been surprised when Dolarhyde had contacted him with information about Marcus' latest auction. They needed to cut the head off the snake as it were, and doing it when Marcus was distracted at his auction was the best time. So, after sitting down to a long conversation with Will, Abigail, Price and Dolarhyde, they'd agreed on their plan and quickly put it into action. Dolarhyde and Price would play obedient guards as they had the entire time, while Hannibal slipped in as an a bidder waiting for his moment to strike. Abigail would remain at the House to ensure everything was prepared for the sudden influx of omegas they'd be taking in, while Will would wait outside the abandoned theatre to act as a calming presence when it came to actually moving the omegas; he'd reassure them the alphas meant no harm.

Marcus Delamare's death had been a long time coming, but come it would.

# Chapter 14

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The sun had been down maybe three hours when Hannibal arrived at the old theatre Marcus' liked to hold his auctions in, and part of him was pleased to fine the Madison-May Theatre more or less just as he'd imagined it; the theatre had probably been an astoundingly beautiful place when first built, shame it sat as a forgotten relic now. Despite the darkness of night, no lights were on at the front of the building, no obvious signs of life, but when he made his way through the front door things changed. Flood lights had been set up in various corners ominously providing just enough light to navigate the dilapidated building. Dolarhyde mostly worked in the back ensuring the omegas were secure and only moved when their numbers were called, everywhere else was under another of Marcus' alpha's purview and thus had made estimating guard quantity throughout the building difficult. Price had done his very best to get them close to accurate numbers but none of them could put much faith in those numbers. As he was escorted into the main theatre Hannibal had counted a few less than expected and found himself wondering if, after they years of selling omegas for a profit with no consequences, Marcus had grown a little too complacent. Arrogance had gotten many a man killed; Hannibal took no issue with it assisting that night.

Around twenty-five bidders had gathered in the main theatre, a quiet night, with maybe eight to ten guards moving about. It was more than he'd ever killed in one burst before, but Hannibal had Dolarhyde and Price for aid so wasn't worried. Hannibal had spent months ingratiating himself with a corrupt policeman he'd learned about from Dolarhyde in order to get an invitation to the auctions – oh the vicious things he'd had to say about his beloved Will had almost broken his resolve, but it had all worked out in the end.

"Good evening, Hannibal."

He internally rolled his eyes as he donned that fake smile of his and turned. "George, I was just thinking about you."

The cop chuckled. "About how pleased you are I invited you, I hope."

"But of course. Without you nothing I've planned would have been possible."

"Hmm. I pity the omega you buy, you're going to slaughter them."

That was Hannibal's turn to laugh, a small breathy sound. "I'll certainly be doing some slaughtering."

While Hannibal played nice out front and waited for the auction to begin, Price quietly went around locking doors and offered to take over for the beta on the main door; an offer which was quickly accepted and allowed him to bar the main entrance as well. Yes, arrogance and complacency truly had gotten so many killed. Price might have mostly been locking doors, but Dolarhyde had been hard at work for a good two hours already. He was always armed, such a thing was expected when one worked for Marcus Delamare, but he'd been nonchalantly hiding extra magazines here and there throughout the backstage and loading area to avoid him getting pinned down anywhere. The plan was a surprisingly simple one: They'd wait for the auction itself to start leaving Marcus distracted and the guards under Dolarhyde's command focused on moving omegas back and forth.

Then, quietly, Dolarhyde would start shooting. He'd let things go on as normal for a few lots while he killed the guards roaming around outside, then he'd begin work inside. Meanwhile, Hannibal would quietly slip out of the auction to deal with the remaining guards out front while Price acted as lookout and moved any obvious bodies out of sight. Only after all that had happened would they turn their collective attention to the main theatre itself.

The first stages of their plan had gone remarkably well. Dolarhyde's skill with a gun never failed to impress and soon all but three of the backstage guards were dead. Hannibal had taken a knife to the ones out front and Price had even knocked one out with a flood light when he'd spotted Price moving one of Hannibal's victims. Marcus being so focused on playing auctioneer, hauling in money, had worked to their advantage, without his coordination their team – because that was what they reluctantly were – had attacked from three sides totally unnoticed. Knowing Marcus had guards stationed on the upper balcony overlooking the main theatre, Hannibal had slipped up there after helping Price move a body, promptly slit their throats and left them where they dropped. His suit was ruined, stained crimson and stank of iron, but that was why he'd chosen to wear black that night. Normally he'd have donned his plastic suit, but that would have been noticed and briefcases of any kind weren't allowed. Long gone were the days of handing over cases full of money, instead everything operated through shady cryptocurrency transactions.

Hannibal rolled his shoulders as he peered down at Marcus on stage. He'd not expected any of this when he'd found Will on the road that icy night. He'd found himself caretaker of a safe haven for abused omegas, he'd killed numerous law enforcement and minor political figures on behalf of said omegas, and now he stood in a decrepit theatre killing with no intention on taking his usual bounty. That night Hannibal supposed he wasn't the Chesapeake Ripper or any of his other nicknames, he was simply a third of an assassination unit. All for Will, everything he did was for Will. Dolarhyde did it for a chance at being with Reba, Price for the greater good and justice, but Hannibal did all of it because Will had looked him in the eyes and said: 'please, alpha.'

Maroon eyes caught sight of Dolarhyde when he slowly peeked his head out from behind the stage curtains and up toward the balcony. The two men nodded to one another, a silent confirmation the time had come to move on to their final task. A three man assassination unit indeed.

Quickly Hannibal made his way back to the main theatre as Marcus made a fuss of selling some poor naked woman while alphas drooled over her. Price stayed by the door to quietly chain it, metal links clattered and that was when guards finally caught on to the death around them.

"The fuck are you doing, Price?" The closest guard called out which drew everybody's attention to him. "Are you chaining us in? What the fuck is wrong with you?!"

He marched forward, yanked his gun free of its holster as he did, but Hannibal got there first. One long slash to the man's stomach then another deep one to his throat and the guard collapsed with a gurgle. Things happened in a blur then, guards launched toward Hannibal only for Dolarhyde to emerge from back stage gunning down guards and bidders alike. Didn't take long for chaos to overtake the room, for alphas and betas to realize fleeing was a better option than fighting back. Burying a blade in George's throat had been a highlight of Hannibal's night, to kill the man who'd only liked Hannibal because of the evil things he'd said about Will was heavenly.

For the most part Price stayed out of the way, he kept himself tucked in a corner far from any stray bullets and stampeding alphas. All around him carnage. Blood of various types pooled on the floor, bangs from firearms like uncoordinated beats on a drum, and the final gasps of air from alphas who'd thought themselves the powerful ones. This wasn't him, Price didn't encourage such

violence, such evil, but this was justice. This was to prevent others going through what Brian had, what Beverly had. This was a justified evil – at least that was what he told himself, what he *needed* to tell himself. Sure, Price wasn't the one who'd done all the killing, he'd left that up to the disturbingly competent alphas, but that didn't stop him having blood on his hands or negate his guilt. He'd befriended these guards, worked with them, then Price had turned on them without a second thought.

The moment everything fell silent bizarrely felt more deafening than when the air had been ninety percent metal. Hannibal and Dolarhyde stood more or less in the middle of the theatre covered in blood and out of breath, with numerous dead scattered around them. A battlefield, that was the only word Price could think of to describe it, a bloody battlefield.

"Where's Delamare?" Hannibal's deep voice drew Price's attention back to the task at hand and finally away from all that blood. "I thought you shot him, Francis."

"I did." The dark-haired alpha confirmed as they all converged on the stage to see a smear of blood leading away. "I clipped him in the kneecap because we wanted him alive."

With a glance to the blood trail, Hannibal and Dolarhyde rushed after it, down steep stairs, around corners and finally out a metal door which had once been blocked by crates. It led out into a grassy area with overgrown bushes, but neither alpha cared about that, not when they saw Marcus' car speed off into the night.

The two men just blinked. Marcus Delamare had gotten away? There one actual target for that night had gotten away. Every single other person inside the Madison-May who wasn't an omega had been murdered, yet Delamare had escaped?

"How did he move so fast on that leg? I kneecapped him to make sure he didn't move."

"Adrenaline and alpha determination." The older man sighed. "It's all right, Francis, I'm not disappointed." That was something of a lie, but he couldn't entirely blame Dolarhyde when he'd not noticed Marcus scurry away either. Also, Dolarhyde had been coming on in leaps and bounds since going on to regular medication and Hannibal had no intention of jeopardizing that. "Marcus has just had the vast majority of his empire torn down, he's badly injured and panicking, we have done well."

"But he's not dead."

Hannibal fixed Dolarhyde with a calming smile. "Everyone dies, Francis, his time will come. For now, let us go back inside and load the omegas into the truck. Jimmy will take them to the House while you and I pile the bodies and burn the theatre down."

"Ritualistic cleansing?"

"An apt description."

Of course the three of them had put on gloves the moment they'd begun killing, so they worried not about fingerprints as they returned inside, especially not when the whole place would be ablaze within the next few hours. Bodies were moved, certain documents were gathered up and Price took some very confused omegas away in the truck. By the time Hannibal and Dolarhyde were ready to strike a match, the pile of corpses looked akin to an Inquisition bonfire or some kind of bloody Christmas tree. The Madison-May being as large as it was had left burning the whole thing quickly

enough and hot enough to get rid of evidence and render corpses unidentifiable something of a daunting task. Too many fires and the oxygen would be eaten up preventing the theatre burning at all, too few and firemen would get the blaze under control much too swiftly. So, with all their options considered, ammonia Price had smuggled in days ago was splashed over the auxiliary hallways and upper floors to eliminate any blood, and accelerant on the multitude of bodies.

The pair had watched the flames slowly engulf the Madison-May silently, flames flickered in their eyes as secrets were burnt away. It wasn't the first time the theatre had burn down, but this would most assuredly be the last. Never again would a play be put on or a song sung, the Madison-May was nothing but a graveyard now.

Once they were sure the fire wouldn't go out and that the building couldn't be saved, the two alphas finally departed to distance themselves from their crimes. Marcus Delamare still lived, but Hannibal was an alarmingly patient man and Dolarhyde wouldn't be satisfied until the man who'd used him like a dog and made fun of his face at every turn was dead.

~X~

Marcus slammed the motel door shut and dropped down onto the bed to fill his lungs with much needed air. He cared not about the dull attempts at decoration or slightly musty smell – it was a cheap roadside motel after all. He'd done his best to wrap his knee up with whatever he had on-hand, but blood continued to pour down his leg causing unimaginable pain. He hissed, he swore, he snarled. Cordell had already been ordered to the motel, the man might never have finished his residency, but he still had all the medical know-how. Mason Verger had used him as his own personal doctor for when he got too rough with the omegas he kidnapped, Marcus had seen a much more useful occupation for Cordell.

His auctions were ruined, his operation in shambles and just about every person he had was now dead. Dolarhyde! Fucking Dolarhyde had turned against him. Out of everybody, Marcus wouldn't have suspected that insane bastard to bite the hand that fed him. He'd never seemed to care about anything as long as he got paid on time, so why had he suddenly grown a conscience? Then there was the beta who'd locked the doors. Marcus couldn't remember his name but knew he'd come from Jack's ruined empire. Then there was the suit-clad alpha, he was the truly dangerous one. It was one thing to shoot a man, it was quite another to gut them in quick succession without even blinking. Marcus hadn't seen him before, George had asked for an extra invitation for a 'like-minded friend' as he'd put it, but George was dead now like everyone else.

Albuquerque. He'd have to limp back to Albuquerque after Cordell had patched up his leg. He'd stay there until he'd recovered and figured out what the actual fuck had just happened and how to keep himself afloat.

~X~

In the month after the Madison-May had been burnt to the ground and Marcus had fled, things had calmed down in terms of exacting revenge. Surprisingly for all involved, Dolarhyde had been oddly accepted at the House. His usual quiet nature and the way Reba clung to him had made the other omegas feel more at ease with him; Hannibal's and Will's assurance had gone a long way to quieting their worries as well. Things were slow going, but there hadn't been a total panic and providing Dolarhyde a stable environment he could eventually be appreciated in would keep the Dragon at bay.

The most important thing, to Hannibal and Will anyway, was that Will's scent had changed confirming that he was indeed pregnant. No doubt, in the coming months, Hannibal would have to set aside his pride and buy his omega the junk food he craved because making pizza from scratch just wasn't the same apparently. Then there was Abigail, she'd rather taken to her online classes and, while the idea of actually entering a classroom was an unpleasant one she'd prefer to avoid, her education was finally back on track. How that girl would one day earn a living remained a mystery, but her new fathers knew she'd excel in whatever she chose. One issue she'd encountered was her last name, even while taking online courses, Abigail had found that the second parents had discovered one of her fathers was Doctor Hannibal Lecter, they'd begun borderline forcing their children to befriend her. Abigail had no time for them, nor want to associate, but still they persisted. There was, however, one flicker of friendship in Abigail's solitary life which went by the name of Marissa Schurr. A naïve girl who wanted to see the best in people even if it meant ignoring the glaringly obvious red flags. In Hannibal's opinion Marissa acted more like the omega rather than Abigail. Still, friendship would be good for the teenage girl. Besides, if something went wrong, Hannibal would kill Marissa in the blink of an eye.

Shortly after Dolarhyde had been unofficially permitted to wander around the House without Hannibal having to be present, Hannibal had thrown himself back into seeing patients. Albert Stanley's treatment had been going well, although taking on Franklyn Froideveaux, who'd already been through a litany of psychiatrists, had come with it's own annoyances and challenges. The man was neurotic, already taken to dressing like Hannibal and, though he didn't usually like to use such lowbrow terminology, a dumbass. Franklyn was manageable though despite his attraction to serial killers, what had put Hannibal on high alert was when federal agents had shown up at his office asking for his assistance in profiling the Flag Killer. Apparently they'd chosen to consult Hannibal about it due to him having a surgery background as well as his psychiatry one, they'd thought him the best of both worlds as it were. While tempted at first to refuse them, the chance to learn more about this new serial killer in their midst had just been too good to pass up. Though it might have been Freddie Lounds to first coin the nickname for him, nobody could deny its accuracy, not even Hannibal when he'd looked through the case file and seen the pictures. 'Frankly', the agent who'd come to see him had said. 'We're not totally certain this isn't the Chesapeake Ripper. He's been acting strangely as of late, teamed up with the Tooth Fairy for at least two kills.' Yes, Hannibal understood their confusion, it had been unusual for him as well. Unless it was to kill Marcus Delamare when they finally found him though, there wouldn't be another team up.

After a good twenty minutes with the case file and assuring the federal agent that this really wasn't the work of the Chesapeake Ripper, Hannibal had been able to build a fairly decent psychological portrait of the Flag Killer, even more so than when they'd briefly discussed him at dinner. While far better than an amateur, none of the cuts could match up to Hannibal's years of skill. Although, seeing just how talented the work was had left him concluding the Flag Killer was a medical student, and a damn good one. The flag poles were all the same square lengths of wood so the killer had clearly prepared rather than using whatever was to hand, and the heart had always been pierced which had solidified Hannibal's previous hypothesis the Flag Killer wanted to own his kills and destroy them. Some cultures ate the hearts of those they'd defeated in battle to steal their power, the

Flag Killer didn't want to steal it, he wanted to wipe it out of existence. For whatever reason, the Flag Killer felt like his victims needed punishing, needed to die slowly and be denied any power that might have remained. Then, with a dramatic display, he turned them into a flag he used to claim them even in death. Another interpretation would have been that he saw these victims as cowards, they lacked courage so there wasn't any power to take in the first place. Hannibal had simplified for those who'd come in search of his aid; a sadistic alpha who had appointed himself judge and jury, who was meticulous, highly intelligent, an introvert who could put on false charm when needed, and almost certainly a medical student. He'd toyed with the idea of a veterinarian for a few moments, but medical student seemed more likely. One interesting thing Hannibal hadn't known until he'd been handed that case file was that the victims' vocal cords had always been severed without any damage to the surrounding tissue; and that was what had led Hannibal to rule out a veterinarian. Frankly, something about the Flag Killer reminded Hannibal of himself and he wasn't sure how he felt about that.

When the federal agent had left, Hannibal had seated himself at his desk and just stared ahead at the windows in thought. The concentration of serial killers in Maryland had to be an oddity among statistics. Hannibal knew he'd could tug on Dolarhyde's leash whenever needed, but the Flag Killer was a fledgeling and might have caused problems further down the line. Regardless, Hannibal remained the most prolific serial killer in modern history and wouldn't be bothered by what was basically a newbie.

Chapter End Notes

Part three called The Flag Killer will begin be posted on 10/14/24

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